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Solemn Christmas Mass fills Cathedral of St John the Baptist – page 6



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Epiphany Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist celebrated by Bishop Peter Collins.

Epiphany Mass shines at Cathedral

The Diocese of East Anglia joyfully marked the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord yesterday with a well-attended Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich. Charlie Bohan-Hurst reports.

■ Despite sub-freezing temperatures, the faithful gathered warmly at the 10:00 celebration, which was reverently led by Bishop Peter Collins. The beauty of the liturgy, combined with the devotion shown by those in attendance, made the celebration a particularly uplifting start to the new year.

The first reading, Isaiah 60:1–6, set a radiant tone for the celebration. “Arise, shine out, your light has come” resonates deeply with the Epiphany’s central message: the manifestation of God’s glory to all nations.

Isaiah’s vision of Jerusalem glowing with the presence of the Lord, drawing distant peoples and kings, mirrors the spiritual journey the Church recalls on this feast. It foreshadows the coming of Christ, the true light who dispels darkness. For those present at the cathedral, the reading served as a powerful reminder that Christ’s light continues to shine into the world’s shadows, calling all to hope and renewal.

The second reading, from Ephesians 3:2–3, 5–6, reflects on the revelation of God’s plan, once hidden but now made known through Christ. St Paul’s emphasis that Gentiles too share the same inheritance speaks directly to the universal scope of salvation celebrated at Epiphany. The visitors from the East who sought the newborn Christ symbolise this profound truth: that he came not for one people only, but for all humanity. Paul’s words encouraged the congregation to recognise their own role in embracing and

proclaiming this inclusive love, especially at the start of a new year of faith and mission.

The Gospel reading from Matthew 2:1–12 recounts the journey of the wise men to Bethlehem, one of the most cherished passages in Scripture. Bishop Peter Collins reflected on their perseverance and openness, as they followed the star with trust, undeterred by uncertainty. Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh testify to their recognition of Christ’s kingship, divinity and future sacrifice. In the context of the Mass, the Gospel invited all present to consider the guiding lights that God places in their own lives, moments of grace and inspiration that draw them closer to Christ.

Although the morning air was sharply cold, the atmosphere within the cathedral was one of warmth and unity. The beauty of the music, the reverence of the liturgy and the joy shared among those gathered

■ story continues on page two.

Restored Rosary window blessed

■ In early 2025, Canon John Barnes, resident priest at St Felix Roman Catholic Church in Felixstowe, commissioned Devlin Plummer Stained Glass, specialist conservators, to inspect and repair the church’s much-loved Rosary Window.

The window, which dates back to 1906, had long endured the full force of the East Coast weather and was showing clear signs of wear. Recognising its historic and devotional significance, Canon John sought to ensure its beauty and integrity for future generations.

Following careful restoration, the window was reinstalled in November, returning renewed colour and vibrancy to the sanctuary. On 30 November, the First Sunday of Advent, a special Mass was celebrated by Bishop Peter Collins, joined by Fr Michael Smith and Canon John Barnes. During the liturgy, Bishop Peter solemnly blessed the restored Rosary Window, marking the completion of the project and giving thanks for the craftsmanship and dedication involved.

Reflecting on the restoration, Canon John said:

“Well, they look quite splendid and I am sure that the sparkle that they had when they were first put in has now been restored. They are looking wonderful, especially today with the sun shining through – how fortunate we are.”

Bishop Peter also expressed his delight: “Well, it’s been a great joy to be here at St Felix’s today to celebrate Mass on the first Sunday of Advent and within that Mass to bless the splendid Rosary Window which is in the rose apse of the sanctuary. With its wonderful demonstration of faith and its depiction of the great mysteries of the faith as we have them celebrated in the Holy Rosary, we thank all the artists who have contributed to the task, and the fundraising of course, and the organisation that has led to this splendid outcome. May it be a blessing to the entire parish community.”

The restored window, now glowing once more with colour and symbolism, stands as a testament both to the faith of the parish and to the care taken to preserve its heritage. Parishioners and visitors alike can again enjoy the window’s beauty as it illuminates the sanctuary at St Felix’s.





Faithful united by the Epiphany

■ **story continued from page one.**

contributed to a heartfelt celebration worthy of this great feast. The presence of visitors and long-standing parish members testified to the enduring importance of this solemnity in the life of the diocese.

The Mass for the Epiphany of the Lord not only commemorated the revelation of Christ to the nations but also renewed the call for all believers to be bearers of his light. As the faithful left the cathedral and stepped back into the wintry Norwich morning, many did so with renewed purpose, resolved, like the wise men, to follow the path that leads to Christ and to make his presence known in the world.



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the Diocese of
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Altar servers honoured in King's Lynn

■ **St Stephen's Day 2025 was marked with particular joy and gratitude at Our Lady of the Annunciation Catholic Church, King's Lynn, where a special Mass was offered in honour of the ministry of the parish's Deacons and altar servers.**

Parish Priest Canon Peter Rollings presided at the celebration, assisted by Assistant Priest Fr Gordon Adam, together with Deacons John Belfield, Shaun Morrison and Martin L'Estrange. The liturgy offered the parish community an opportunity to give thanks for those who serve faithfully at the

A highlight of the celebration came as Canon Peter Rollings presented six altar servers with the St Stephen's Medal, recognising their dedication, reverence and commitment to service. The parish warmly congratulated the recipients and expressed heartfelt thanks to all altar servers for their contribution to the prayerful life of the

community.altar throughout the year.

The joyful feast day gathering served as a reminder of St Stephen's example of faithful

service and strengthened the sense of unity and mission within the King's Lynn parish as the Christmas season continued.



Filipino community unites for Simbang Gabi

Filipino parishioners at St Peter's Church in Gorleston joyfully revived the cherished *simbang gabi* tradition, uniting the community in prayer, music, cultural celebration and shared hospitality in the lead-up to Christmas. Cynthia Wilson reports.

■ *'Simbang gabi'*, Filipino for 'night Mass', is a nine-day series of novena Masses attended by Filipino Catholics in anticipation of Christmas. Held from 16 to 24 December at varying times, this cherished tradition began during the Spanish era in the Philippines and has since become a distinct cultural practice symbolising community and sharing.

Around 50 to 60 parishioners from St Peter's Catholic Church, Gorleston, attended a Filipino-led *simbang gabi* on Tuesday, 16

December 2025, celebrated by Fr Alvan Ibeh. Introduced at the parish only last year, the tradition is gradually gaining popularity among local parishioners in the Great Yarmouth area.

It was a joy to hear Filipino Christmas songs led by the Filipino choir and to see children reading the bidding prayers. Participating in the celebration brought back memories of attending *simbang gabi* with family and friends in the Philippines, truly a feeling of home away from home. It also prompted reflection on how these joyful devotions of prayer and music have spread across the world. I hope our second generation of Filipino British children will also come to understand the meaning of this devotion and form their own cherished memories. As Fr Alvan said, "We hope to do more next year, by God's grace."

Simbang gabi is believed to have begun during early Spanish rule, originally intended for farmers who started work before sunrise to avoid the midday heat. In our local parish it

is held in the evening to accommodate hard-working Filipino migrants whose schedules make evening attendance more feasible. Some hospital staff even swapped shifts to take part.

In keeping with tradition, coffee, tea and Filipino Christmas treats including rice cakes (puto bumbong) and coconut-based sweets were served in the church hall after Mass. Parishioners brought dishes to share, symbolising blessings, hope, resilience and the togetherness of a community of faith, much like the guiding star of Bethlehem.

It was heart-warming to see the contributions of those who cooked with love, prepared the hall and helped with the clean-up. The Filipino spirit of *bayanihan*, or working together, was truly alive. And no Filipino gathering is complete without photos, conversations and more singing. With spirits lifted and stomachs full, we returned home with gratitude and blessings.

Several other *simbang gabi* celebrations took place across the Diocese.



The Filipino community in Gorleston.

Celebrating 50 years of the Diocese of East Anglia

The Diocese of East Anglia is marking its 50th anniversary with a Jubilee Year of celebrations, encouraging everyone to explore the places, history and growth that have shaped its Catholic life. Frederick Corbett explains below.

■ For most of the three centuries before 1850, Catholics in England were a persecuted and harried minority, banned from most public offices and places of education, and subject to fines and imprisonment. Priests (at least until 1700) risked torture and execution if identified. There were few churches and no parish system. Anti-Catholic laws were repealed only in 1829, and it was not until 1850 that Catholic dioceses and bishops were re-established. Only then did a functioning system of parish churches and schools begin to emerge. East Anglia was grouped with five East Midlands counties into the vast Diocese of Northampton. In most parts of England – though far less so in East Anglia – a majority of practising Catholics were of Irish descent, and this region remained the least Catholic area of the country.

Then, in 1976, with diocesan and parish structures fully operational, Pope Paul VI issued a bull dividing the Diocese of Northampton in two, establishing the Diocese of East Anglia to include more than 50 parishes in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. By then, Mass attendance in the new Diocese had reached over twenty-five thousand. In that memorable year, on 13 March 1976, the first Bishop of East Anglia, Rt Rev Alan Clark (1976–1995), was appointed, and what had been the very large parish church of St John's in Norwich (built between 1882 and 1910) was consecrated as the new Cathedral of East Anglia in June 1976.

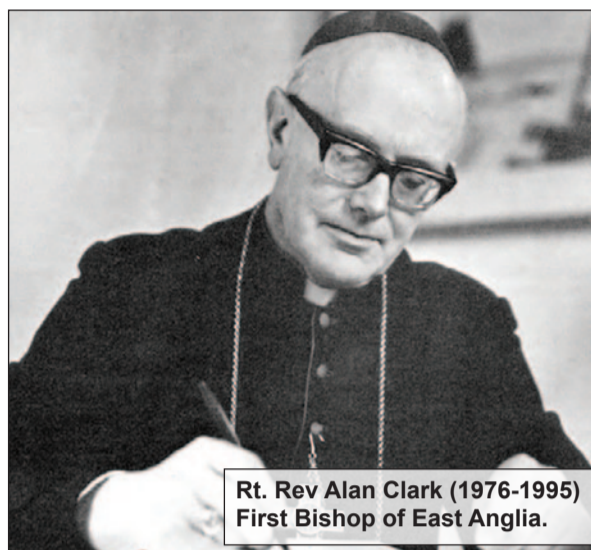
This is truly something the whole Diocese should celebrate. Bishop Peter has therefore designated this year as a Jubilee Year to mark the 50th anniversary of our Diocese. There will be celebrations at Diocesan, Dean-

ery and Parish levels, and several Diocesan Commissions will also be organising events. All of our Catholic schools have been invited to plan and deliver a project related to the Jubilee during the year. A small working group, under the guidance of Fr John Morrill, is preparing guidance for parishes to celebrate their history, growth and change over the last 50 years, and to look forward to the next stage of our mission. Many parishes have already appointed one or more co-ordinators to assist Parish Priests in organising local celebrations.

Clearly, many of us find that our commitment and knowledge centre on the church we attend for worship, but we hope everyone will come to understand and celebrate their parish, whether it has one church or several. It can sometimes be difficult to feel a sense of belonging to larger geographical areas such as the Diocese. For this reason, we have set the following aims for our year of celebration.

Firstly, it should help all parishioners and clergy understand the history and role of the Diocese, and the important places within it that have influenced and shaped our Catholic lives. Secondly, we should consider and learn from the changes of the past 50 years – both the blessings and the challenges. Thirdly, we should reflect on how our Catholic lives are changing: our organisation, congregations, volunteering, buildings, music and liturgy. Finally, reflecting on the past and celebrating the present should inspire us to contribute to the future of the Church in our parishes and in the Diocese as a whole.

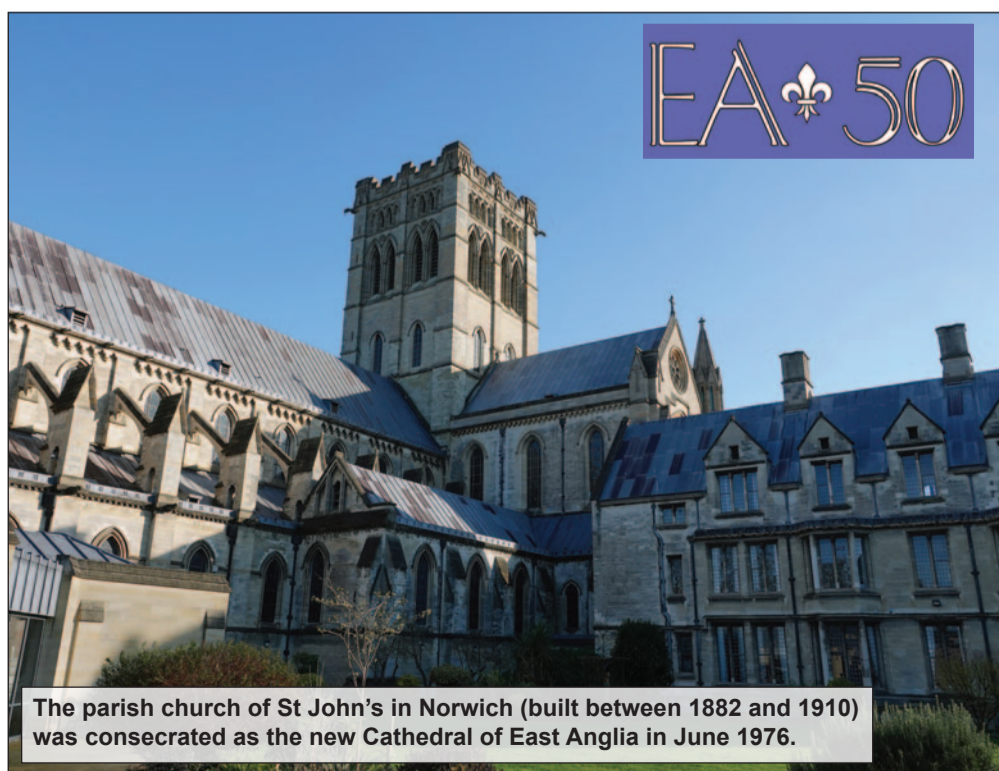
As a contribution to this, the working group will provide a monthly feature in this Diocesan newspaper highlighting locations in the Diocese that are special to us – places everyone should know about and, we hope, be inspired to visit and explore. East Anglia is rich in events, buildings and people who have shaped our ability to worship God and gain strength to live active Christian lives in love of God and neighbour. We will focus on one or



**Rt. Rev Alan Clark (1976-1995)
First Bishop of East Anglia.**

two such places each month, beginning next month.

I hope you will enjoy discovering these places and take the opportunity to explore them further as we celebrate the blessings of our region and thank God for our fifty years as a Diocese. To whet your appetite: can you name these three places, and why are they important to us? You will find the answers to these and many other fascinating sites in the Diocese over the coming months of 2026.



The parish church of St John's in Norwich (built between 1882 and 1910) was consecrated as the new Cathedral of East Anglia in June 1976.

Pilgrimage of Hope: A Witness from Rome

■ A Cambourne parish musician reflects on her faith-renewing pilgrimage to Rome with the Catholic Police Guild during the Jubilee Year of Hope, including a memorable encounter with the Pope.

My name is Shumona, and I serve as a musician at Our Lady of Lourdes & St John Fisher's Parish in Cambourne. Recently I was privileged to join the Catholic Police Guild of England & Wales (CPG) on the Jubilee Pilgrimage to Rome, an experience that has deepened my faith and renewed my hope.

As a mum working full-time, life can often feel overwhelming, yet my faith continues to guide me through its many challenges. In October, I had the wonderful opportunity to take part in the Jubilee 2025 pilgrimage, during which I met His Holiness Pope Leo XIV in person. The 2025 to 2026 Jubilee, themed "Pilgrims of Hope", calls each of us to "fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision", in the words of Pope Francis.

The Jubilee is a sacred time of spiritual renewal and forgiveness within the Church. Every 25 years, the four main Papal Basilicas in Rome and Vatican City open their Jubilee doors. This tradition began with Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 and symbolises a special pathway to God's mercy and grace.

Thanks to the Catholic Police Guild's organisation, and alongside colleagues from police forces across the United Kingdom, I was able to explore many of Rome's ancient and holy sites. Our National Chaplain, Fr Barry Lomax, guided us spiritually each day, celebrating Mass in the beautiful Chapel of the Venerable English College which forms seminarians for England and for dioceses around the world.

The highlight of the pilgrimage for me came at St Peter's Basilica where we attended the weekly General Audience. It was there that the Catholic Police Guild presented the Pope with a custodian police helmet bearing the cypher of Greater Manchester Police, which he graciously accepted. He then approached and blessed my rosary. This was a deeply personal and moving moment which I will cherish forever.

This pilgrimage has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Although I feel a little sadness that the journey has ended, I remain profoundly grateful for the blessing it has been. My faith has been renewed in ways I can only begin to describe.

I return home carrying a renewed strength that will guide me in the days ahead.

For anyone considering joining the Pilgrimage of Hope, which remains open until January 2026, I can only encourage you to go. You will not regret it.

Further information about the Catholic Police Guild can be found at: www.catholicpoliceguild.co.uk

Joyful Christmas celebrations in Sawston

The Cantonese Catholic community came together in joyful celebration on Christmas Day at Our Lady of Lourdes, Sawston, where a special Cantonese-language Mass was held to mark the Nativity of our Lord.

■ Parishioners and visitors from across the region joined in the celebration, filling the church with prayer, song and a strong sense of unity.

Christmas, a season rooted in hope, love and togetherness, was beautifully reflected throughout the liturgy. Celebrated by Fr John Minh, the Mass enabled worshippers to engage deeply with the readings, hymns and prayers in Cantonese, creating a warm and spiritually enriching atmosphere. The liturgy emphasised the enduring message of God's love made present through the birth of Jesus Christ, and the congregation participated wholeheartedly, contributing to a reverent yet uplifting celebration.

Following the Mass, the community gathered in the church hall for a festive tea and social celebration. Families and friends shared homemade treats, from savoury pastries to traditional Christmas cakes, offering a warm and hospitable welcome to all. Laughter and conversation filled the hall as people renewed friendships and enjoyed the joy of the season.

Carol singing added to the festive spirit, with the community proclaiming the Good News through well-loved Christmas hymns. A particularly moving moment came as everyone joined together to sing O Little Town of Bethlehem in Cantonese, its gentle

melody underscoring the blessings and grace of Christ's birth.

A highlight of the celebration was a special lucky draw, featuring gifts thoughtfully sourced from Rome in honour of the Holy Year. These tokens of faith brought excite-

ment and delight to both children and adults, serving as tangible reminders of the community's shared Catholic heritage and the bonds that unite them.

Strengthened by the joy of Christmas and their shared celebration of faith, community

members left encouraged to continue walking together in unity, hope and love. The gathering not only commemorated the birth of Christ but also offered a moment of renewal as the community looks ahead to 2026 with gratitude and anticipation.



Fr John Minh with a gift from the lucky draw.

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Support from college students

St Edmund's Catholic Church in Bury St Edmunds is preparing to open its grounds to the public next year as part of the Hidden Gardens fundraiser in aid of the local hospice.

■ Thanks to the generosity and hard work of students from West Suffolk College, an important step towards that goal has already been achieved.

Behind the church lies a large and much-loved garden, set within the presbytery grounds and tended by parish volunteers. However, a low retaining wall had long been a concern: unstable, unsafe, and well beyond the parish's limited maintenance budget. With no funds available for repair, the Parish Pastoral Council feared it might jeopardise their plans to participate in the charitable open-garden scheme.

Help arrived in an unexpected and very welcome form. Students from the building department at West Suffolk College, accompanied by their tutor, offered to take on the

project as part of their training. During December, the team carefully dismantled the failing structure and rebuilt the entire wall free of charge, using mostly reclaimed bricks supplied by the parish.

Maree Reilly, Secretary of the Parish Pastoral Council, expressed the parish's gratitude. She said that the students and their tutor had come to the parish's rescue and that their skill, enthusiasm and gener-

osity had transformed not only the wall but the whole feel of the garden. She added that the parish was very grateful for their support.

The newly restored wall now stands ready to welcome visitors when St Edmund's joins other local gardens in supporting hospice care next year, an uplifting example of community collaboration and the goodwill that thrives within the Diocese of East Anglia.



Students from West Suffolk college providing support at St Edmund's.

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Festival gives major boost to church organ rebuild fund

The Organ Rebuild Fund at St Peter's Church, Gorleston, launched early last year by organist Matthew Hardy, has taken another significant step forward thanks to the success of the church's Christmas Tree and Music Festival.

■ Held over five days in the final run-up to Christmas, the festival brought together seven concerts and three carol services, attracting strong support from parishioners and the wider community. The event was officially opened by the Mayor of Great Yarmouth, Cllr Carl Annison, joined by pupils from St Mary & St Peter Primary School, Gorleston, whose contributions helped set a joyful tone for the days that followed. Attendees were warmly welcomed with refreshments after the opening ceremony.

Among the musical highlights were two sold-out Christmas concerts presented by the Chorus of St Cecilia, offering a rich programme of choral and solo music. Throughout the week the church remained open to visitors, who were able to enjoy a spectacular display of Christmas trees decorated by groups from both the parish and the

wider community.

In total, more than 900 people attended the festival, helping to raise an impressive £4,000. This brings the Organ Rebuild Fund

to a current total of £22,146.

The parish extends its heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed, including performers, decorators, volunteers and visitors,

for their generous support and enthusiasm in helping preserve the musical life of St Peter's.



One of the sold-out Christmas concerts at St Peter's church.

New Altar for St Edmund, King & Martyr, Halesworth

■ The parish of St Edmund, King & Martyr in Halesworth has marked an important moment in its recent history with the installation of a new altar.

The previous altar, damaged beyond repair when a falling tree tore through the sanctuary roof, had been replaced with a temporary structure that, while serviceable, was never intended to be long-term. In time it became clear that a more fitting and permanent altar was needed for the celebration of the Mass.

The newly installed altar is crafted from oak, its clean and simple lines harmonising beautifully with the character of the church, which dates from 1957. Significantly, it has been designed to house the original altar

stone, thus preserving an important link with the parish's past.

In a pleasing turn of Providence, the altar was delivered on 19 November, just in time for its first use at Mass on 20 November, the Feast of St Edmund, the church's patron.

The altar installation forms part of a wider programme of refurbishment undertaken over recent months. The church interior has been completely redecorated, and a new floor covering laid, giving the sanctuary and nave a renewed sense of warmth and reverence.

The people of St Edmund's now look forward to many years of worship around their new altar, grateful for the restoration and renewal it represents.



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Final Caritas festival of 2025 celebrated

■ On Saturday 6 December Bishop Peter began the Bury St Edmund's deanery Caritas Festival at St Edmund King and Martyr Church by concelebrating Mass with the parish priest, Fr Sean Connolly, the dean, Fr John Warrington, and the chair of the Caritas Commission, Fr Peter Raj.

In his homily Bishop Peter linked the readings of the day to both the Advent "the season of waiting when as the readings remind us in a very real sense, the Lord is never absent" and to the purpose of the Festival "celebrating the service rendered by many in the Church and beyond the Church to addressing the needs of all and the vulnerable. The Gospel relates primarily to the apostolic ministry, but a mantle of apostolic mission is also laid upon all the baptised. We pray that God's human beings will recognize their responsibilities, their mission to see the need that is there before our eyes, then employ every talent to address that need."

One of the participants could not be accommodated in the crypt since it was the SOS Bus from Newmarket. Its presence enabled everyone to see what facilities the project delivered late at night to those in need in local town centres. Another participant, a beneficiary of a grant from the Alive in Faith Social Fund was Reach from Haverhill which proactively tackles poverty ensuring access to emergency food, utilities vouchers, financial advice, benefit support, housing assistance, and by working to prevent poverty by delivering financial literacy education and empowering people to rebuild their lives.

The other local organisations represented were based in Bury St Edmunds: Bethany Group Bereavement Support; Catenians; Feel Good Suffolk; Helping Hands; and SVP. Also present was the diocesan Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking awareness raising project.

Before ending the festival with a blessing, Bishop Peter shared his reactions to what he had seen and learnt. "The role of the SOS Bus reminds me that when I was dean of the Cathedral in Cardiff, we used some of our resources as a hub for the ambulance service in the city centre. Although there was a lot of work clearing up afterwards, there was great, great work being done. No one stands in glorious isolation. No one can survive within the confines merely of their own circle. This festival has been a listening exercise as much as a promulgation exercise. We have been listening to each other and learning."

David Livesey Caritas East Anglia Administrator said, "I am pleased that, with the first Caritas Festival planned for March 2020 having been postponed by the Covid epidemic, we have in the past two years at Bishop Peter's request delivered seven festivals in every diocesan deanery. All of the many projects celebrated at each festival will continue whilst the Caritas East Anglia Commission will work with Caritas in other dioceses to develop ways of: listening to and documenting grassroots lived experience in local communities; and, promoting integration and participation of Catholic migrant communities in their parishes so as to empower them to address and to advocate for their needs."

Solemn Christmas Mass



Bishop Peter Collins presents the Christ Child to the congregation.

The Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich was filled to capacity on Christmas night as parishioners, visitors and families gathered first for a Carol Service and then for Midnight Mass celebrated by Bishop Peter Collins. Charlie Bohan-Hurst reports.

■ With the choir leading the congregation in traditional carols and the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ marking the transition into the liturgy, the atmosphere was one of reverence and joyful expectation as the Church welcomed the birth of the Saviour.

The readings of the Mass offered rich insights into the meaning of the Nativity. Isaiah 9:2–7 spoke of a people walking in darkness who see a great light, a prophecy fulfilled in the birth of Christ whose titles of peace and kingship illuminated the night's celebration. Titus 2:11–14 reminded all present that the

Incarnation is an ongoing invitation to renewal, as the grace of God appears and teaches believers how to live with purpose and hope. Luke 2:1–14 presented the familiar and tender Gospel of the Lord's birth in Bethlehem, the humility of the manger and the angelic announcement of peace which continues to resound through Christian life.

In his homily, Bishop Peter called the faithful to contemplate the Nativity as a present and transformative encounter. He reflected on the dignity of every human life and the divine closeness revealed in the Christ-child, urging

s fills Cathedral



those gathered to look again at the mystery of God made flesh and to recognise the call to service and hope that flows from it.

After the final blessing and dismissal, the congregation joined wholeheartedly in singing Hark the Herald Angels Sing, bringing the celebration to a triumphant close.

Bishop Peter's engagements

JANUARY

- Jan 22, Thurs**
Bishop to celebrate Mass at Notre Dame High School at 11:00.
- Jan 23, Fri**
Bishop to meet with Ignite Team at 17:00.
- Jan 26 – 27, Mon – Tues**
Bishop to attend the EWARC Meeting, overnight in Northampton
- Jan 28, Wed**
Bishop to attend a lunch for Ecumenical Leaders arranged by Churches Together in Cambridgeshire from 11:00.
- Jan 29, Thurs**
Bishop to attend the AGMs of the Our Lady of Walsingham Trust and St John the Baptist Trust from 10:00.
- Jan 30, Fri**
Bishop to the Annual Katherine of Aragon Commemoration Service at Peterborough Cathedral at 11:00.

FEBRUARY

- Feb 2, Mon**
Bishop to attend The Presentation of the Lord (World Day for Consecrated life) Annual Meeting of Religious and Mass at the Cathedral at 11:30.
- Feb 5, Thurs**
Bishop to Diocesan Liturgy Commission Meeting at 11:00 in Poringland.
- Feb 7, Sat**
Bishop to attend Annual Mass to celebrate Our Lady of Lourdes with Anointing of the Sick at the Cathedral at 11:30.
- Feb 10, Tues**
Bishop to London to attend a meeting with the Allen Hall Formation Team in London at 16:15 followed by Sung Vespers at 18:30.
- Feb 11, Wed**
Bishop to attend Bishop's Council Meeting in Poringland.
- Feb 12, Thurs**
Bishop to attend Meeting of the Deans in Poringland at 11:00.
- Feb 14, Sat**
Bishop to attend Marriage and Family Life Commission Meeting at 11:00 in Poringland.
- Feb 18, Wed**
Bishop to celebrate Solemn Pontifical Mass for Ash Wednesday at 17:30 in Cathedral.
- Feb 22, Sun**
Bishop to attend Rite of Election at 15:00 at the Cathedral.
- Feb 24, Tues**
Bishop to attend Lenten Station Mass at St Peter and All Souls, Peterborough.
Format:
18:00 Exposition and confession
19:00 Mass
20:00 Light buffet or Soup.
- Feb 25, Wed**
Bishop to attend Department of Dialogue & Unity meeting in London.
- Feb 26, Thurs**
Bishop to attend Diocesan School's Service Commission Meeting at 10:45, Poringland.
- Feb 26, Thurs**
Bishop to attend Lenten Station Mass at Our Lady of the Assumption & the English Martyrs, Cambridge.
Format:
18:00 Exposition and confession
19:00 Mass
20:00 Light buffet or Soup.
- Feb 27, Fri**
Bishop to meet with Ignite Team at 18:00.

STORIES FROM OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN EAST ANGLIA

Operation Christmas Child in 2025

Mark and Debra Watkins, volunteer Church and Community Relations team members with Operation Christmas Child (OCC), have once again spent the year supporting churches, schools and local organisations who partner with the charity to fill shoeboxes for children and young people around the world.

■ Their work has helped continue a strong tradition of support among Catholic parishes and schools in the Diocese of East Anglia.

This year, their outreach has included St Peter's Church in Gorleston; St George's Parish in Norwich; the Cathedral of St John the Baptist; Our Lady and St Walstan in Costessey; Cromer and Sheringham RC churches; and St Mary and St Peter Primary School in Gorleston.

Mark and Debra were particularly delighted to spend time with young people in the diocese. They spoke to the Cathedral youth group and visited St Mary and St Peter's Primary School, where they met "a group of fun and giving children, wanting to action their faith."

An unexpected blessing came when the Union of Catholic Mothers at Our Lady and St Walstan gifted a generous donation to support OCC's work. Meanwhile, David Burn, a Catholic from North Norfolk, has played a vital role by attending OCC workshops and encouraging Sheringham and Cromer parishes to take part. He has also reached out to other denominations — an effort described as "a great act of unity and working together."

Reflecting on the year, Mark said, "last year was positive in bringing new partners to share in this ministry and this year has been exceptional, for which we say thank you to all involved and also to God. In each of the churches, volunteers help with this ministry, from making gifts to the giving out and collecting in off shoeboxes and sending them off in prayer, our thanks goes to all who supported and gave."

Operation Christmas Child has now been



Debra and Mark with students at St Mary and St Peter Primary School in Gorleston.

running for more than 30 years, yet its heart remains simple. Debra explained, "we see the joy in those who plan this ministry; who fill shoeboxes and pray before they are sent. Then we hear about and see the joy on the recipients faces. We are also fortunate to hear the testimonies of those children who now serve with OCC knowing the difference it made to them. Please do not underesti-

mate the value of this simple gift, given in the name of Jesus."

Anyone interested in finding out more about Operation Christmas Child for their church, school, group or business can contact Mark and Debra Watkins at markdebrawatkinsocc@yahoo.com.

More information is also available at: www.samaritans-purse.org.uk

St Alban's pupils explore the nativity at OLEM

■ Pupils from St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Cambridge, enjoyed a special opportunity on Monday morning to deepen their understanding of the Nativity story and its significance within Catholic tradition.

As part of a planned workshop, two groups of children visited Our Lady of The Assumption and The English Martyrs (OLEM), where a beautiful and prominently displayed Nativity scene served as the focus for an engaging and faith-filled learning experience.

The school had invited Francesco Connola, the artist responsible for the display to speak to the pupils about the origins of the Nativity scene, drawing particularly on traditions from Catholic countries such as Spain and Italy, where many of the figures in the crib have their roots. The children were fascinated to discover the meaning behind several characters, including the shepherd

carrying a sheep across his shoulders, and the figure known as *Benino*. Francesco explained that *Benino*, shown asleep, can symbolise humanity's dormant spiritual state before the birth of Christ.

The workshop was enriched further by an intervention from Mgr Eugene Harkness, who spoke to the children about the fisherman figure holding a fish.

The children also enjoyed assisting the Francesco as he demonstrated how to create a small Nativity scene at home, offering them a hands-on opportunity to engage creatively with the tradition.

The visit proved to be both culturally enriching and spiritually meaningful, giving pupils a deeper appreciation of the Nativity and its symbolism within the Catholic faith. St Alban's staff expressed their gratitude to OLEM, Mgr Eugene, and the artist for providing such a valuable and memorable experience for the school community.



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Day of Prayer for Engaged Couples - 15 February

The Day of Prayer For Engaged Couples is happening this year in our Diocese on Sunday 15 February 2026.

■ The months leading up to a wedding can be very busy and stressful, but engaged couples are reminded that the most meaningful preparation is not for the wedding day, but rather for the lifelong commitment of marriage itself.

To support couples on this sacred journey, our Diocese holds an annual Day of Prayer for Engaged Couples; this is a special occasion dedicated to seeking God's blessing and guidance for those preparing for the sacrament of marriage.

Priests are encouraged to invite all the engaged couples in their parish to attend one particular mass on Sunday 15 February. At

the end of Mass the engaged couples are invited forward in front of the congregation to receive the Blessing Of Engaged Couples from The Book of Blessing.

If you are engaged and would like to receive this Blessing then please contact your parish priest to let them know.

In addition, we specially remember engaged couples during the Prayers Of The Faithful at Mass that weekend.

This year, the Day of Prayer For Engaged Couples also sits at the very end of National Marriage Week (7 to 14 February), an initiative promoted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to celebrate and strengthen the vocation of marriage.

The timing offers a seamless continuation: as the national week draws to a close, our Diocesan communities are invited to focus their prayer specifically on those preparing to marry.



Vocations focus: Fr Peter Wygnanski

As the Diocese of East Anglia continues to celebrate its 50th Jubilee Year, we are shining a spotlight on the people who live out their vocations in service to our diocesan family. Each month, we meet a member of our clergy or someone in formation, reflecting on their call, their ministry and their hopes for the future.

■ This month, we hear from Fr Peter Wygnanski, Private Secretary to Bishop Peter Collins and Catholic Chaplain to the University of East Anglia, who shares how his vocation first took shape, what inspires him in his ministry today, and why fostering vocations remains vital to the life of our diocese.

"With the 20/20 vision of hindsight, the early signs of my vocation to the priesthood are visible in my youth as an altar server at St Laurence's parish, Cambridge. However, it was only when at university that a quiet, vague, possibility of a calling to be a priest 'one day' became something more serious. Getting to know seminarians at World Youth Day '08 in Sydney gave me awareness enough of the practical path to picture myself on it and opened the possibility of the spiritual growth in that direction. For a number of years I would go to Taizé, in France, where I started to learn what prayer really was, and I began to catch glimpses of the peace that comes in drawing close to God. Despite my best efforts, including pursuit of a career as both engineer and then musician, I could not escape the intuition in the depths of my heart that the spiritual peace I had found could not be replicated by anything else and so the yearning for that inner peace slowly became the force most determining my decisions and longings. In

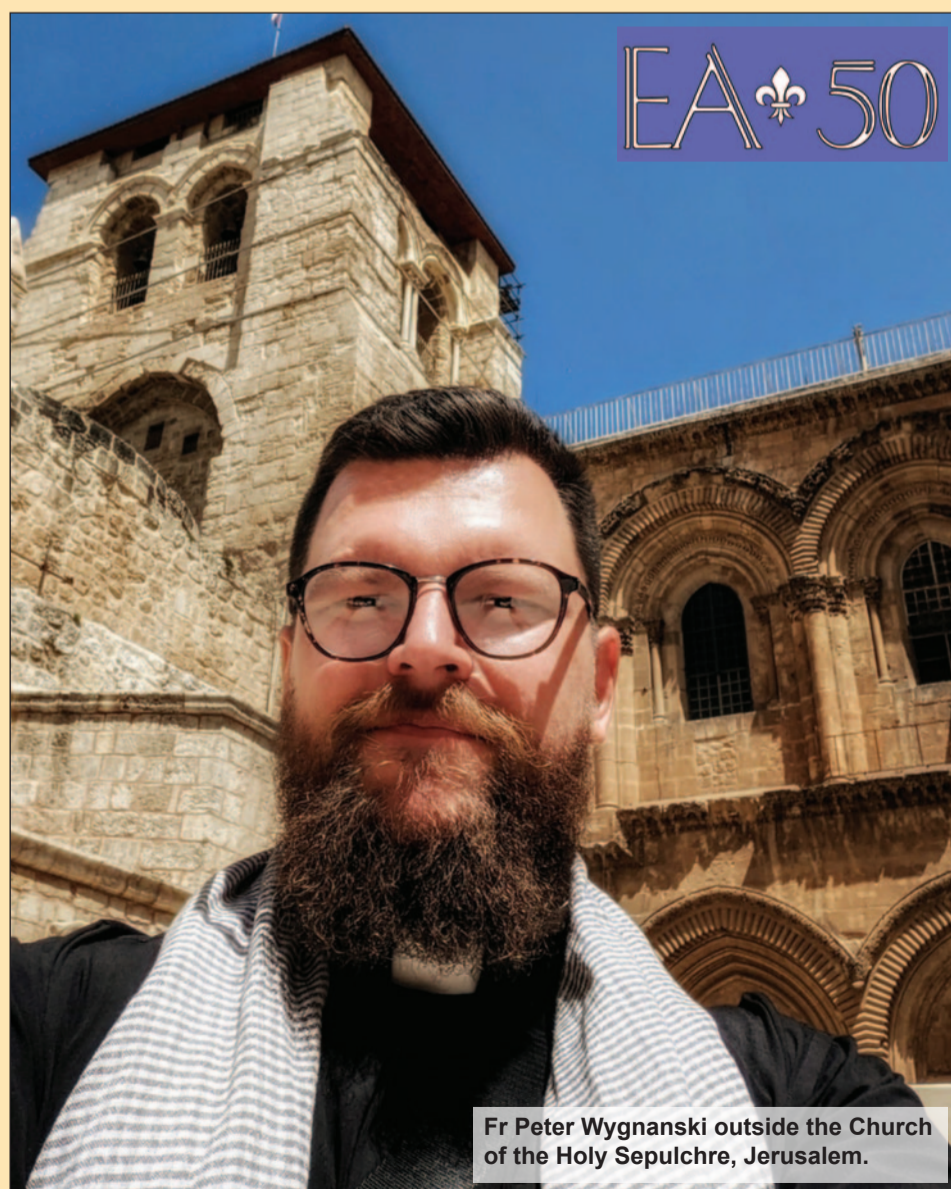
time, I became aware of the possibility that allowing myself to be shaped by the Holy Spirit might only be possible to the full within the life of a priest. It was in Taizé that I first approached Bishop Michael Evans to surprise him by sharing a possible call to the priesthood. His words of advice and encouragement that evening support me even today.

My experience of the path, through long but happy years of discernment, formation, and now priesthood, learning to trust God's plan for my life, has been a discovery of the offer of the life of the Resurrection. Sharing each day more and more in Jesus' risen life, a life where grace makes me free for service of others, prayer, and worship of God, becomes a double blessing as, in particular in ministry with university students and young people, I can support others on the journey of discovering the treasure of that grace-filled life God wants to share with us all. I gave God thanks for this reality when I celebrated Mass in Christ's empty tomb, at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and my devotion to the Resurrection is the air in my spiritual lungs and the vitality of the priestly ministry Jesus entrusts to me.

My hope is that, in the years to come, we can better encourage one another to think, not "what do I want to do", but what is the service God is calling me to, as we share a conviction that God's blessings for each of us come when we generously take our place in the story of His plan for humanity. Let us especially encourage our young people to be bold, to take the risk of following Jesus in ways that may, at first, seem daunting. There is nothing to be lost in seriously asking the question 'What does God want me to do with my life', and everything to be gained. Pope Benedict XVI would often say that world promises comfort, but God did not make us for comfort but for greatness: In East Anglia, the home of Our Lady of Walsingham, we have the perfect

model of letting God's life take flesh within us. Let us allow the pattern of Mary help us build communities centred on the Gospel where, as Pope Leo XIV has described, young people can hear and mature in the

call to total gift of self. By our choice to cooperate with God's plan in this way, we can all become springs of living water in a thirsting world."



Fr Peter Wygnanski outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.

Solemn Mass for the Immaculate Conception

On Monday 8 December 2025, a Solemn Pontifical Mass was celebrated at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

■ Bishop Peter Collins presided over the liturgy, which highlighted the depth of the Church's devotion to Our Lady and the beauty of God's saving plan.

The feast recalls that Mary, from the moment of her conception, was preserved by God from the stain of original sin in view of the mission entrusted to her: to be the Mother of the Saviour. The readings chosen for the celebration illuminated this mystery from Scripture, revealing how God's grace was preparing for the coming of Christ from the very beginning.

The first reading, Genesis 3:9–15, 20, brought the assembly back to the Garden of Eden where the fall of humanity is met immediately with a promise of redemption. The Lord's words that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head have long been understood by the Church as the first announcement of salvation. Mary, the new Eve, stands at the centre of this promise as one who, unlike Eve, remains untouched by sin and wholly open to God's will.

In the second reading, Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12, St Paul's powerful proclamation of God's eternal choice further illuminated the feast. The faithful were reminded that Mary's immaculate conception is not an isolated gift but part of God's plan before the foundation of the world, a plan that brings grace and holiness to all through Christ. Mary is the first to receive that fullness of grace, reflecting the destiny God desires for the whole Church.

The proclamation of the Gospel from Luke 1:26–38 drew hearts and minds to the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel's greeting, "Hail, full of grace", resounded through the Cathedral, emphasising the purity and grace that filled Mary long before this moment. Her humble and courageous "yes" opened the way for the Word to become flesh.

Beautiful sacred music, prayerful reverence, and the solemnity of the liturgy combined to draw those present more deeply into the meaning of the feast. The Cathedral



Bishop Peter Collins presided over the liturgy.

community rejoiced not only in honouring Mary but in acknowledging the mercy and love of God manifested in her immaculate beginning.

The Diocese of East Anglia gives thanks for this joyful and faith-filled celebration, entrusting the coming year to the loving intercession of the Immaculate Mother of God.

New Catholic DEO for Norfolk and Waveney

■ Pam Smith, a parishioner at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich, has been appointed by Bishop Peter Collins as the new Denominational Ecumenical Officer for Norfolk and Waveney.

Her path to this role has been shaped by a long and varied journey of faith. Baptised into the Church of England, Pam later felt a clear call to become Catholic, a conviction strengthened when she met her future husband. After being received into the Church in 2001, she spent several years working in IT across North America, where worshipping in diverse communities and participating in charismatic prayer groups deeply enriched her spiritual life.

A strong influence on Pam's formation has been the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, particularly its openness to the Holy Spirit and the guidance offered by clergy. In 2024 she became Coordinator of the Charismatic Diocesan Service of Communion, supporting unity among charismatic ministries and strengthening their relationship with the wider Church.

Pam's commitment to ecumenism is rooted in Catholic teaching, which she sees as emphasising unity, dialogue and cooperation as works of the Holy Spirit. She believes Christians are called to encourage one another in the shared journey of faith. Looking ahead, she is eager to work with fellow DEOs and welcomes contact from anyone interested in ecumenical matters.

East Anglian clergy gather for Advent day of recollection

Thirty clergy from across the Diocese of East Anglia — both priests and deacons — gathered at Clare Priory on Tuesday 2 December for a Day of Recollection marking the beginning of Advent.

■ Hosted by the Augustinian community at Clare, the day was led by the Rt Rev Alan Williams, Bishop of Brentwood, who guided participants through a period of prayer, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

Bishop Alan invited the clergy to step back from the demands and pace of parish life to consider afresh the meaning of the *adventus Domini* — the coming of the Lord — in their own lives this year. He reflected on the diversity of ministries and personalities present, noting that despite many differences, one truth was held in common: *each person carries within them a space that only Christ can fill.*

During a later session, Bishop Alan offered a reflection on Mary's interior life. He highlighted the Greek verb used in the Gos-

pels, often translated as "treasured" or "pondered" — a word that can also be rendered as "juggled." Mary, he explained, "juggled" the many events unfolding around her, yet in the midst of that movement and uncertainty, she discovered a deep stability and stillness rooted in God's presence.

The quiet atmosphere of Clare Priory — one of the earliest Augustinian foundations in England and a long-standing place of retreat — provided a fitting environment for clergy to pray, rest, and reconnect with the heart of their vocation as Advent begins.

Clergy gathered at Clare Priory.

Faith in the Home

Fasting and Abstinence

■ In this *Faith in the Home* article, Dr Antonia Braithwaite discusses Lenten practices that help Catholics draw closer to God throughout the season.

As Lent approaches, the Church invites Catholics to practise fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and to embrace a spirit of self-denial throughout the season. For many families, these practices may seem daunting or old-fashioned, yet fasting and abstinence have deep biblical roots, are modelled on Christ himself, and have long formed part of the Church's wisdom for all the faithful. The Code of Canon Law still teaches that these penitential practices remain obligatory for Catholics on certain days of the year.

In England and Wales, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays of the year unless a Solemnity falls on that Friday. Abstinence does not mean one must eat fish. It simply means avoiding meat. For those who rarely eat meat, the Bishops recommend giving it up on Fridays nonetheless and choosing an additional, personally challenging form of abstinence. This obligation binds Catholics from the age of 14, unless they are ill, pregnant or otherwise excused.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Catholics from the age of 18 until the start of their 60th year are also required to fast. Fasting means eating one modest meal and up to two small snacks, traditionally called collations, that together do not amount to a full meal. Those with health concerns or serious reasons are exempt.

Children who are not yet bound by these rules should still be encouraged to enter into the spirit of penance in age-appropriate ways. Families might give up sweets, limit screen time or set aside another small pleasure. Such practices help children recognise that these days are sacred and prepare them for fuller participation later in life.

Throughout Lent, Catholics are encouraged to unite some form of fasting, whether from food, technology, habits or other comforts, with prayer and almsgiving. At its heart, fasting is an expression of love. We do not fast to earn God's favour or to display willpower. By freely giving up something good, we train our hearts to love more deeply.

Fasting strengthens the will, teaches self-mastery and helps us choose what is good even when it is difficult. It can also be an act of repentance, a turning away from comfort as a sign of sorrow for choosing against God's will. Fasting lifts the mind to God, deepens gratitude and nurtures compassion for those who live with genuine scarcity.

When practised with joy and moderation, fasting becomes not a burden but a pathway to prayer, gratitude and love. Seen in this light, fasting and abstinence are time-honoured gifts that help families grow in holiness and draw nearer to Christ during the season of Lent.

Lowestoft Parish marks 60 years of Nostra Aetate

■ Parishioners gathered in the Stella Maris Hall, Lowestoft, on 22 November for a thoughtful and informative exhibition marking the 60th anniversary of Nostra Aetate (In Our Time), the landmark 1965 Vatican II declaration that continues to shape the Church's dialogue with other faiths.

The event aimed both to celebrate the anniversary and to deepen understanding of the document's enduring significance. Nostra Aetate opened a new chapter in the Catholic Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, encouraging mutual respect, open dialogue and a shared commitment to peace.

Visitors were invited to reflect on this legacy through articles highlighting anniversary celebrations held in Rome and at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham. A particularly well-received element of the exhibition was a display of religious artefacts representing five world faiths: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. The collection

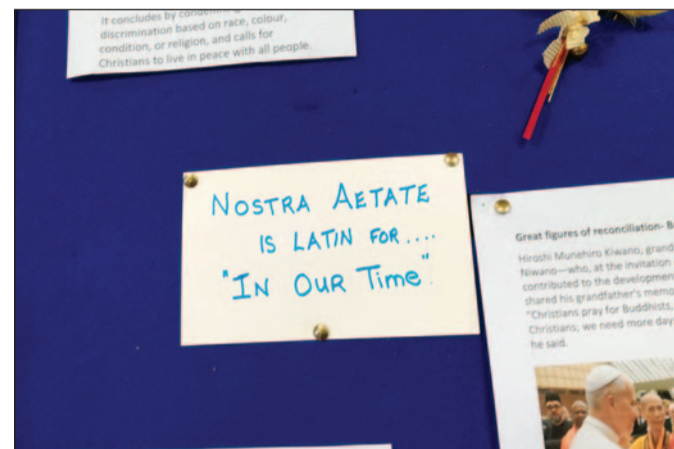
encouraged parishioners to appreciate the richness of each tradition and to recognise the common threads of faith that unite communities across the globe.

The exhibition's impact extended beyond the hall itself, as parishioners shared images and reflections on parish social media, helping to spread the message of interfaith understanding more widely.

In a keynote address marking the anniversary, Cardinal George Koovakad reflected on the profound impact of the declaration, noting that "from a seed of hope a great tree has grown", one whose branches continue to inspire hearts towards peace and reconciliation. He added that "the spirit of the Nostra Aetate Declaration is greatly needed today" — a reminder of the

document's continued relevance in a world still seeking understanding across religious and cultural divides.

The exhibition in Lowestoft stands as a local testament to that ongoing mission, encouraging renewed commitment to dialogue and unity within the Diocese of East Anglia and beyond.



Fr Alvan: A message of hope

In his regular column Fr Alvan Ibeh encourages readers to enter 2026 with renewed faith, trust, and hope in God, who guides, sustains, and remains faithful through every challenge and season of life.

■ If you are reading this article right now, I want to say congratulations for making it into the new year. You are among those who have been privileged to land safely as flight 2025 came to an end. Welcome on board flight 2026; fasten your seat belt, and I hope you enjoy the flight. But this is a gentle reminder that, if you are to enjoy this flight, you must put aside whatever happened during the previous flight and focus on this present one. It is very particular, but we still have the same pilot, who is God, and the angels as our flight hosts and hostesses. All we need to do is relax, because if God is the pilot, then no matter what comes our way during this flight, there will be no need to panic, for we are safe in His hands.

As we step into the year 2026, many people carry mixed emotions: hope, expectation, anxiety and uncertainty. The world continues to face challenges, from conflict and economic pressures to environmental concerns and personal struggles. For some, the new year arrives with excitement; for others, it comes after seasons of loss, illness, disappointment or deep fatigue. There are indeed many feelings and emotions that come with the new year.

But into this reality, the Word of God speaks a gentle but powerful promise: hope is not cancelled by hardship, and the future is not abandoned by God.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us, "See, I am doing something new; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19). God is not absent from our world. He is active, creative and faithful, often working quietly beneath the surface of our lives, even when

we cannot yet see what He is doing. But if we are to see what He will do this year, we must remain focused on the One who has the power to heal our past and bless our future.

Our hope in God is not simply positive thinking. It is not denying pain or pretending that everything is fine. Not at all, for that may only be optimism. Rather, hope is the deep confidence that God remains present and purposeful in every season of life. It assures us that, no matter the situation we find ourselves in, God is ever present and fully aware. Hope reminds us that, notwithstanding what happened in 2025, 2026 will bring something better our way. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). God draws especially close to those who suffer.

Saint Paul echoes this trust when he writes, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). This does not mean that everything that happens is good, but that God can bring meaning, healing and growth even from painful experiences.

At the heart of our hope as Christians stands a person: Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Saint Peter calls this "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The resurrection assures us that darkness does not win, death does not have the final word and despair is never the end of the story. Because Christ lives, hope lives, and this hope, St Paul says, "does not disappoint."

Jesus himself says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27). These words are not an escape from reality but an invitation to trust, to believe that God walks with us into the unknown future. We do not know what the new year holds for us, but we are secure in the knowledge that we are in safe hands.

In a society often dominated by anxiety and uncertainty, hope becomes a quiet but



powerful witness. Jesus reminds us, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). The world does not need more fear-filled voices; it needs people who live with trust, kindness, patience and courage. The world needs you and me as powerful witnesses of the hope God offers to those who believe and trust in Him.

As we begin 2026, God invites us to trust again, even after disappointment; to love again, even after hurt; and to believe again, even after long waiting. The Book of Lamentations offers a beautiful assurance: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23). We firmly believe that each day of the new year is already touched by God's mercy.

The year ahead may not be easy, but it is held by God. And that is enough. The Letter to the Hebrews encourages us, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

So we step into 2026 not with fear, but with faith; not with anxiety, but with trust; not with despair, but with hope, a hope that does not disappoint, because it is rooted in the faithful love of God.

Wishing you all a blessed New Year of 2026.

Picture gallery from parishes around the Diocese



■ On Saturday 20 December, Peter Ho and Anthony Reilly were ordained to the diaconate by Archbishop Bernard Longley at St Mary's College, Oscott.

The celebration drew clergy and supporters from across the country, including representation from the Diocese of East Anglia. Among those present was Bishop Emeritus Alan Hopes, who joined in the joyful occasion as the two candidates took this significant step in their vocational journey.

Deacon Matthew Allen was also in attendance, offering his support, though he is not pictured.

■ Parishioners at Our Lady of the Annunciation, Poringland gathered in joyful celebration last weekend for a parish feast marking St Andrew's Day.

More than 50 members of the community came together to enjoy a hearty breakfast, complete with a distinctly Scottish flourish: haggis, served alongside the morning fare.

The celebration opened with a special St Andrew's Day grace led by Fr Andrew Eburne, who offered words of welcome and reflection. He invited parishioners to pray intentionally for anyone they knew who shared the name of the beloved apostle, encouraging a spirit of gratitude and intercession.

The event provided not only a chance to honour St Andrew, but also an opportunity for fellowship, warmth, and shared tradition within the parish community — an uplifting start to Advent and a reminder of the strength found in gathering together in faith.



■ In November last year, the Diocese's annual Retreat Day for Women was held at OLEM in Cambridge. Sixty women gathered to reflect on the theological virtue of hope, and in particular on "waiting in hope," especially in times of pain and difficulty.

Through talks given by the sisters from the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham, the women were guided into a deeper understanding of what hope truly is and what it is not.

Further details of the event can be found on the diocesan website.