

The Seven Churches Benefice

Our Benefice Profile

Parishes of Aldwincle, Clopton, Pilton, Stoke Doyle, Thorpe Achurch, Titchmarsh, Wadenhoe



“Our Vision is to be a thriving rural Benefice whose Christian values and actions contribute to and engage the communities they serve.”

2025

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in this position and taking the time to read our Benefice profile. We hope it offers you an intriguing and enticing glimpse of the opportunities there are to lead our rural Benefice in our next steps to bring more people to faith in Jesus Christ.

As you will read further on, as part of a rural community we have already developed relationships with people outside the immediate church family. The time of vacancy has increased our desire to be outward looking and has brought some success, but it is now time for our next step forward.

So, if you would enjoy living and working within a rural Benefice set in the beautiful Nene Valley then be assured that you would be welcomed into a community which offers a range of interesting opportunities and challenges as you seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

We look forward to meeting you, trusting that you will like us, and that we like you; that we understand each other, and want to work together with you as our interim Priest-in-Charge to make a lasting difference.

We are not expecting you to have all the answers but seek your teaching, encouragement and spiritual leadership in order that we are better prepared to reach out to our community, help others understand why Jesus is so important in our lives and come to enjoy a living relationship with him.

If you are a person who knows that this is where you can make a difference, who prays for our growth in faith – then we will welcome you warmly to our Benefice.

The Seven Churches Benefice PCCs

I am delighted you are considering this important interim role. I have worked with this Benefice over a significant period of time now and have enjoyed their passion and commitment to their own villages and the benefice.

As a Diocese we believe that this is a place with plenty of mission opportunities particularly with the schools of the Benefice. During the vacancy these relationships have been maintained through the commitment of congregation members and clergy colleagues from across the Deanery.

We have a vision for these parishes to become the thriving benefice they hope to be with people of all ages discovering faith for themselves.

As these communities grow it is our prayer that the financial sustainability will be strengthened to enable further mission and ministry in these places.

I look forward to working with the new Interim Priest-in-Charge of the Seven Churches Benefice.

The Venerable Alison Booker (Archdeacon of Oakham)

Contents

The Seven Churches and Our Vision	1
Welcome	2
Contents.....	3
Our Mission	4
The role and what we hope you can offer us	5
How we can support you	7
Our Benefice: Opportunities & Challenges.....	8
Our priorities for the next 3 years	11
Want to know more about us?.....	12
Is this the next step for you?	13
APPENDICES	14
A. Our Benefice Communities	15
B. Our Churches	20
C. Aldwinkle Rectory: A Place to Call Home	22
D. Our Current Services	23
E. Special Annual Services	24
F. Benefice Data	25
G. Youth, Children and Community Work.....	26
H. Benefice Groups, Activities, Communication	27
I. Finances	29
J. Ministry and Lay Teams.....	30
K. Deanery Overview and Support.....	31

Our Mission

We are working to realize our Vision through our Mission of:

“Growing the Christian presence in the Seven Churches Benefice and reaching out to meet the spiritual needs of all who live in our community.”

Jesus told them: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”. Luke 10:2

Worship and Outreach

Our churches are a central part of the parish communities within the Benefice. The approach to worship is largely, though not exclusively, traditional, as is common in many rural communities. Although regular church attendance at services is not as high as we would wish it to be, our churches provide a variety of other opportunities to connect with their communities and are well-supported in diverse ways. There is a shared sense of community in each parish with the Parish Church as a central focus.

Our churches work hard to meet their communities’ spiritual and physical needs, but we see an opportunity to build on our traditional approach to encourage all generations to become more involved in our Christian life and the wider work of the Church in our villages.

We take seriously the spiritual growth of our parishioners by encouraging prayer and study groups to help strengthen people’s faith and understanding.

In the last three years we have focused our outreach across the Benefice towards our two Church of England schools where there has been an increased impact. There is still a long way to go with reaching teenagers, young adults, families and the elderly.

This is the new chapter we wish to embark on.

The role and what we hope you can offer us

Role Description for the post of interim Priest-in-Charge in the Seven Churches Benefice

OUR NEED

As a Benefice, we are challenging ourselves to grow, particularly by a focus on the next generation of younger people to take our mission forward. To help us to do this we need an energetic and enthusiastic priest who is excited by the opportunities and challenges we face in this diverse rural Benefice.

OUR NEW INTERIM PRIEST

Will be a person who is:

- A collaborative leader
- Able to engage with people of all ages
- Energetic and enthusiastic
- A spiritual leader who is trusted, principled and prayerful
- Able to develop a variety of appropriate worship styles
- Able to engage with regular worshippers and the wider community
- A catalyst for change
- Kind, compassionate, sensitive and caring
- Welcoming of all people
- Relational with an appropriate sense of humour.

A person with the following skills and experience:

- Co-create a shared vision
- Good listening skills – active and sensitive
- Work with a variety of approaches and understandings of Christianity
- Understanding and experience of Rural Ministry
- Ability to identify the gifts of others (spiritually discerning)
- Ability to innovate and value tradition simultaneously
- Good social and communication skills
- Change management experience.

KEY TASKS FOR OUR INTERIM PRIEST

Alongside the PCCs, Authorised Ministers and Congregations:

- Enable a review of ministry in this Benefice
- Ensure the Church is providing pastoral and spiritual support to those in the village and missional connection e.g. Nene Way users
- Review the relationship with the two C of E schools
- Enable the Benefice to reimagine how schools' ministry could develop going forward
- Work with the Diocesan Youth and Children's team to create and embed a new vision for engaging with all ages
- Work with the Diocesan Generous Giving team to build a financially sustainable model of ministry which meets the missional and pastoral needs of the benefice while also ensuring the wellbeing of the Clergy
- Work with the Rural Dean and Archdeacon to ensure strong Parish governance
- Transform the approach and understanding of safeguarding.

How we can support you

We aim to support our interim Priest-in-Charge on this Benefice growth project by:

- Continuing to take responsibility for the fabric of the buildings
- Giving practical and emotional support and assistance
- Shouldering more of the day-to-day administrative tasks including lay chairs for PCC's and taking responsibility for the practical running of meetings
- Meeting as churchwardens on a regular basis to arrange cross Benefice coordination and mutual support
- Being your eyes and ears in each parish
- Communicating and working with you and with each other
- Building links between the church and our own communities and by our actions live the Word
- Having the confidence to take on more responsibility where we can
- Being welcoming and friendly and making sure we are not too demanding
- Having a unity of purpose without presenting a uniformity in how we all do things
- Working with you and the ministry team to achieve our Vision.

Our Benefice: Opportunities & Challenges

We are a group of seven rural parishes whose collective aspiration is to be a Christ-centred Benefice that embraces the local community and continues to spread the Good News primarily by living the Word. We enjoy a unity of purpose without presenting a uniformity in how we approach our worship and Church life.

Current Situation and Background

As a Benefice we aim to be relaxed, warm, open minded and welcoming to all sectors of society: those of different socio-economic, gender and ethnic backgrounds, and those in different kinds of relationships. We also fully embrace the ministry of women in all areas.

We currently have a diversity of worship ranging from traditional Holy Communion, Morning and Evening Prayer or Compline, to more informal worship. One of our parishes (Clopton) has a more contemporary expression of 'church' with no formal services but this complements all the other churches in the Benefice which offer traditional worship.

Our Readers cover most of the non-Eucharistic services and also, by permission of the Bishop, take Communion by extension when required, as well as distributing communion to the sick at home visits. Some Churchwardens also lead non-Eucharistic worship and members of the congregation do the readings and are encouraged to write and lead intercessions. We endeavour to make all services inclusive and accommodating for the congregations they serve. Most parishes are keen to increase the breadth of styles of worship, particularly where there are opportunities to attract younger congregations. The Benefice is currently working with The Souster Youth Charity through the trusteeship and volunteering of one of the Readers. We also valued the director's input when trying to revive the youth group after the COVID lockdown and hope to involve them in future developments.

A relaxed Tea, Cake and Worship service is held monthly open to all ages. An online 'Thursday Praise' is also held monthly. A weekly breakfast and bible study / discussion group is held involving members from across the Benefice.

Special services, such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance are well attended by regular church goers and the wider community and we are keen to build on this.

Music in church is provided by our talented organists and there is a willingness to broaden the musical styles during worship. There is an active bell ringing community and our churches also attract visiting bell ringers.

Our lay-led PCCs provide the mainstay of our effective organisation of all administrative and financial aspects of each parish and management of the church buildings which are generally in sound condition with no major expenditure planned in relation to repairs and maintenance. Regular Churchwarden meetings provide a forum to share experience with architects, builders, church security systems and also, importantly, consider strategic issues and share ideas.

Overall, we aim to be innovative and supportive to each other as we try to work together for special services, fund raising and social events, and share expertise and experience across the Benefice.

Opportunities

We are enthusiastic about the opportunities for growth across the Benefice and we are prepared to put in the effort needed to deliver this with the help of the interim Priest-in-Charge and the ministry team:

- We must continue to keep the church at the heart of the community partly as we are dependent on non-churchgoing community members for both financial and practical support but also, more importantly, so that we can continue to provide spiritual and pastoral support.
- A new incumbent would give us the opportunity to review with the ministry team our service pattern and service type including inter-generational services and innovative forms of worship, as well as providing the spiritual and pastoral leadership which needs to be a focus for the growth of the Benefice.
- Our two Church of England schools are keen to involve the church in services, collective worship and input into the curriculum. We have been managing to do this with the help of our Reader and clergy from neighbouring Benefices. We would want the incumbent to work with the Benefice team to strengthen this work.
- A monthly Sunday school was previously organised by a member of the congregation and held as part of the Family Holy Communion service in one of our parishes. This has lapsed but could be re-invigorated.
- A small group of teenage Christians took part in a Youth Group prior to lockdown but this remains an area for further development and follow-up.
- We are prepared to embrace different types of worship and music while retaining the core of traditional services and hymns.
- Some parishes are working together for fundraising which has stimulated enthusiasm and growth.
- Our churches are adjacent to a well-known walk, The Nene Way, which provides the opportunity to publicise our mission and outreach to a wider community.
- We aspire to continue the reordering of our churches and the installation of serveries and toilets so we can make them more fit for purpose and available for other community use as well as church activities. In most parishes the church building is the only, or at least a primary, community space and provides a focal point for all parishioners and the opportunity to engage with non-churchgoers.

Challenges

We are impacted by:

- Small numbers of young families attending worship and small congregations where the loss of one family can have a large impact on numbers and finances.
- Our congregations currently tend to consist of older parishioners who do not always welcome change, for example in relation to types of worship and hymns; finding approaches that achieve a balance between traditional types of services that meet the needs of our current congregations, and the introduction of more lively, participatory worship that might attract a younger congregation, is important.

- Older teenagers face pressures from outside and often don't find current styles of worship attractive.
- The legacy of our church buildings which are expensive to heat, maintain and insure and when restorative work is required then the costs are high.
- The lack of facilities and inflexibility of pews in most churches. This limits the type of events that can be run for fund-raising and/or to engage with the wider community.
- Our varied understanding of new technology and its financing, in particular the need for our churches to respond to climate change and meet the 'net zero' target which will require substantial investment.
- While the critical importance of safeguarding is well appreciated across the Benefice, there is still a need to further transform our approach and move towards an active understanding of safeguarding so it is embedded as a proactive responsibility for all. This is a challenge in diverse rural parishes and communities such as ours.
- The division of the Parish Share between the seven churches in the Benefice has always been a matter of debate and whichever formula is used there are winners and losers. Meeting the Parish Share remains a challenge.
- Diocese action promoting industrial development on arable Glebe Land in the Nene Valley has negatively impacted on the Church's relationship with our local communities. There have been financial consequences too, with a few regular givers removing their support.

Our priorities for the next 3 years

We appreciate that achieving our vision is going to take place over more than the next few years and will be ongoing. In the next 3 years we hope that, working with us, our interim Priest-in-Charge will:

- Provide spiritual guidance and work with the ministry team developing our styles of liturgy so they provide opportunities for different forms of worship to meet the needs of a wider and younger demographic
- Engage children, young people and families with church and maintain their interest as they grow older
- Listen and discern our individual Parish and Benefice needs and desires and provide pastoral support and guidance.
- Help us grow our Benefice so that it thrives and we realise our Vision.
- Working with our Benefice, the Deanery and the Diocese to achieve the tasks set out on page 6.

Want to know more about us?

Each parish has prepared a short statement about the life in their village and church. These are located in Appendix A.

Rather than make this document a reading marathon, we have not included details about the church buildings other than a photograph of each in Appendix B. A snapshot of information can be provided for each church if required. Information is also available on [A Church Near You](#) website.

Information about the Rectory, which is in Aldwincle, is given in Appendix C.

We have included some information about our current service pattern, special services and previous years' benefice data and finances in the remaining Appendices.

Is this the next step for you?

Does this challenge interest you?

Is God calling you?

If so, you can find out more about the Benefice on these websites:

www.titchmarsh.info

www.oundledeanery.org.uk

www.achurchnearyou.com

Informal contact can be made with:

The Archdeacon of Oakham, The Venerable Alison Booker
Archdeacons Office, Cheryl Cullen (PA) 01733 887019
archdeacon.oakham@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

The Rural Dean of Oundle, Rev Eddie Smith 07740909756: eddie.smith@talk21.com

An application form can be obtained from:

<https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/aboutus/vacancieslist/full-time-stipendiary>

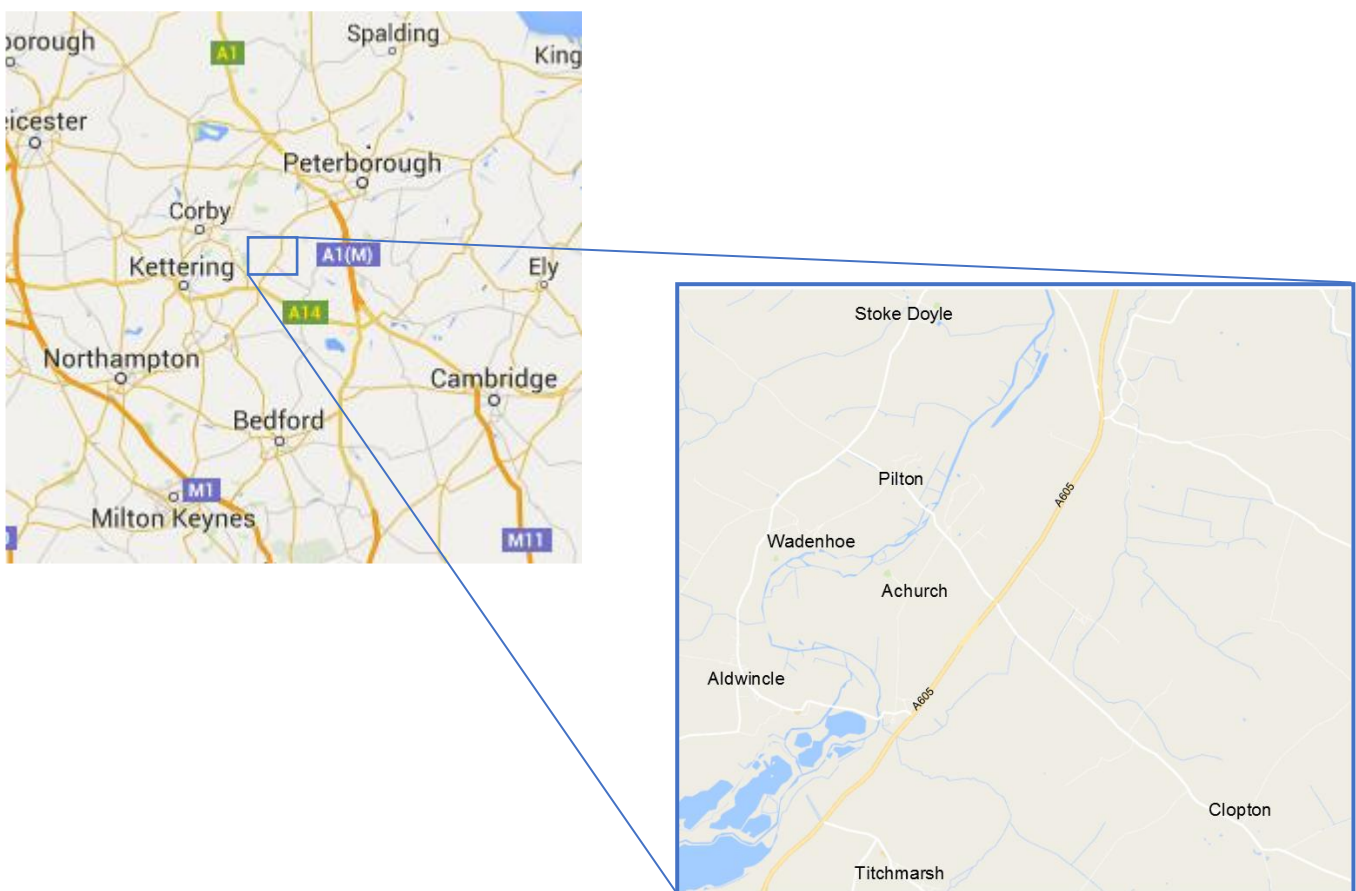
APPENDICES

A. Our Benefice Communities

For the first half of the 20th Century and for many hundreds of years before, the Seven Churches Benefice was primarily a farming community with associated trades and services. The number of farms, and particularly their need for manual workers, has decreased, although local trades and services still abound. However, homeworkers and those who work outside the community have increased.

The Benefice comprises 7 rural parishes in the Deanery of Oundle, lying within the Nene Valley.

The Benefice lies between the market towns of Thrapston and Oundle and is within easy reach of Peterborough, Northampton and Cambridge. Our excellent transport links - both road and rail - mean that access to London and other parts of the UK make this rural location an attractive place to live.



In addition to the churches, village halls in Aldwincle, Titchmarsh and Wadenhoe provide a hub for social activities in the Benefice. There are two C of E schools within the Benefice, one in Aldwincle and one in Titchmarsh.

The parish council is the same as the ecclesiastical parish in: Lilford cum Wigsthorpe, Thorpe Achurch and Thorpe Waterville PC; Aldwincle PC; Titchmarsh PC and Clopton parish meeting. Whereas Pilton, Stoke Doyle & Wadenhoe have a joint parish council. In some cases PCC members are also Parish Councillors.

Each of the parishes has contributed a short description of their community which can be found below.

Aldwincle

Aldwincle is a small village and civil parish in East Northamptonshire. The name of the village is probably derived from the Old English personal name Ealda or Alda meaning Old, and Wincle, a bend in the river. It is a beautiful location, situated on the River Nene between Thrapston and Oundle. There are fishing lakes and a nature reserve which have been developed from the original sand and gravel pits in the area. These places attract many visitors to the village.

Aldwincle has a mixed population of around 350 people, many now retired who have moved to the village. Employment in the area is a commute to local towns, although since Covid times we have seen many people in the village now work from home. There are a number of small home-based businesses, a garage and a village shop, as well as a farm and a hair and beauty salon.

We have a very well established Primary School in the parish, Trinity CE Lower School. In 2019 the school became an academy with the Peterborough Diocese Education Trust. The school's mission statement is, "Growing hearts, minds and souls". St Peter's Church is involved in many different areas of school life.

Aldwincle has a well-used Village Hall with various weekly classes including Zumba, Art, Yoga and Upholstery. The Friendly Club for senior members of the community meets once a month as does the ladies social group, Birds of a Feather. Originally the Village Reading Room, it has been extensively refurbished to include a catering standard kitchen which is a good resource for church, village events and for private hire. There is also a children's play area situated in the grounds.

We have a Community Choir and a Sign Language Club, which on occasions participate in church services here and at Thorpe Achurch. Although our regular congregation is not large, we are well supported by villagers at special services such as Remembrance, Harvest and Crib service. A group of people keen to ring the bells is just getting started.

The PC and the PCC work hard at supporting the village community. Our annual pancake lunch draws many villagers. This year we are arranging a Christmas Tree Festival working closely with Thorpe Achurch.

In the village there is an historic Baptist Chapel. The village also benefits from having another Anglican church building from the days when Aldwincle was two separate villages. This Church is dedicated to All Saints and was declared redundant some years ago. It is now in the care of the Churches' Conservation Trust. All Saints was one of the first churches to introduce "champing" and has proved popular with walkers and canoeists using the nearby River Nene.

Aldwincle has its place in history, being the birthplace of the poet, John Dryden, 1631-1700, and the English churchman, historian and author, Thomas Fuller, 1608-1661.

For a successful applicant wanting to come to Aldwincle to live and work in our beautiful rural environment, we can offer you a warm welcome, support and a varied but satisfying and interesting way of life.

Clopton

Clopton is in the main a linear village along the B662, on the border with Cambridgeshire; there are approximately 60 houses with about 150 residents. Originally a farming village the population would have been mainly agricultural workers and their families but now only a small number of the population are directly involved with farming. The present population is a balanced mix of all ages, the occupations of the residents are varied with the majority working away from the local area. During recent times an increased number of residents are working from home, spending more of their amenity time locally and demonstrating an increased enthusiasm for the area.

For our Rogation service we travelled the village with tractors and trailers giving thanks at all the traditional places. We were joined by a gospel choir for our harvest celebration, with food served during the interval. A service of Remembrance was held with the last post played by the village trumpet player. Our Christmas celebration has most recently taken the form of a congregation participation Nativity complete with donkey and sheep, followed by turkey rolls. We've held successful fund raisers in the form of a quiz night with fish and chips, and a wine tasting evening.

We have taken the approach of encouraging all people to feel welcome and comfortable within the church building and have held our services on different days through the week to encourage those who have other commitments at weekends to still join us. The events were well attended and received promising feedback; however, we have not been able to gather since the Nativity of 2019.

We are looking for an incumbent who can help us build on this contemporary expression of church and allow us to complement those other churches in the Benefice who offer more traditional worship. The village lacks amenities and is off the public transport network; with no village hall, shop, or pub. We believe that St. Peter's can offer the village a central hub, not only of faith but also for other community purposes. We would like to encourage the use of the building for social interaction as well as personal reflection, through this use we hope to bring the community together, enabling us to involve more residents who have different qualities and skills to offer and would otherwise choose to stay outside of our church community.

We currently have a book share corner, which, is proving very popular and encouraging people to visit the church, which is always open.

Pilton

Pilton, being the smallest parish in the Benefice with only 48 inhabitants (22 households), is also one of the smallest villages in the Diocese. Our monthly Communion service usually attracts a congregation of about 6, with the fifth Sunday service averaging attendance from across the Benefice of about 15. The majority of parishioners celebrate the main festivals in the Church calendar and play an active role in fundraising events in aid of the Church. In addition to Church services, we have used the building for a variety of activities, such as a popular series of classical music concerts, tai chi exercises, village meetings and local history exhibitions. Although Pilton is a small, scattered community, it has an energetic PCC which works closely with other parishes in the Benefice through the sharing of resources, fundraising events, auditing of PCC accounts, conservation of church monuments, Harvest Suppers and Remembrance Day Services.

Manor Farm, in the centre of the village, is the main economic hub of the community, with 4 family members also farming in neighbouring Achurch and Titchmarsh. Apart from farming, residents are also engaged in a variety of professions including accountancy, engineering, insurance, school maintenance, police, public relations, painting and decorating. There are 8 young people under the age of 20 and 10 people are no longer in full time employment.

Stoke Doyle

Being the second smallest parish in the Benefice with only 40 houses, Stoke Doyle is a very friendly community where everyone looks out for their neighbour. This was particularly apparent in the Covid pandemic when a WhatsApp group was set up - 'the Hub', and volunteers carried out shopping and prescription runs for those unable to leave their homes. This community spirit extends to the church; although the congregation size is small and parishioners mainly elderly, residents are always willing to support fund raising events, by making cakes, buying tickets or helping with church cleaning. Our wildlife churchyard is a very important part of Stoke Doyle life with willing helpers for mowing, the Open afternoon in the summer and the Churchyard clear up in the autumn.

St Rumbald tower houses a wonderful ring of 5 Thomas Eayre Bells. The whole village community supports projects like the recent bell restoration, with volunteers giving many days to assist with the re-hanging. Now we enjoy the sound of the bells again, which ring for some of our services, and of course on the regular Wednesday afternoon ringing practice which attracts ringers not only from the village but the Benefice and beyond.

Other recent projects undertaken include the installation of a kitchenette / servery adjacent to the organ, the refurbishment of the north windows, repair of the west doors and we continue to persevere with plans for a toilet / store room, in a new building. Stoke Doyle is very supportive of the annual Ride and Stride raising money for the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust, and projects benefit from grants from the NHCT and, of course, half the sponsorship money comes back to the church.

Monthly communion services have a small but loyal congregation with about half coming from Oundle or the Benefice. Our special services of Harvest, Rogation, Remembrance and more recently a service raising money for Ukraine are always well supported. A music group, the Ruff Recorders, have regular practices in the church and contribute to services and particularly to a 'Christmas Cracker' an evening of readings, music and carols that has been held for more than 20 years.

We look forward to welcoming a new incumbent who would support and encourage us in our small community by visiting and getting involved in our projects and activities as well as services.

Titchmarsh

Titchmarsh is an active community with several village organisations involved in running various facilities and fundraising events. The PCC is an integral part of that community and PCC members serve on the Clubroom Committee, Fete Committee, Playing Fields Committee and are involved in running the Village Shop (a community enterprise).

Although there is a relatively small cohort of regular churchgoers, the wider village give strong support to the church through regular giving, attendance at fundraising events, helping with churchyard tidying and other tasks. This support has strengthened over the last few years since the reordering of the church which has led to more extensive and varied use of the facilities, e.g. Monday Morning Café run by PCC members and a rota of village volunteers, messy church, forest school, village fete, fruit & vegetable show, exercise classes, concerts, meetings, fundraising events, birthday parties, and in 2016 a wedding reception.

However, the recent sale of a development option on Glebe Land in the parish is providing a challenge to the relationship between this church and the local community as well as affecting other churches in the Nene Valley.

Titchmarsh PCC took a leading role during the covid pandemic – initiating on-line church services which continue to this day and taking an active part in "Support@Titchmarsh" a group set up to deal

with the early impacts of the pandemic by identifying vulnerable members of the community, providing help with shopping, picking up prescriptions and providing comfort & emotional support.

Titchmarsh PCC see ourselves as relaxed, welcoming, non-dogmatic, open minded and cheerful. We see the complementary relationship between priest and congregation as embodying two-way learning & support.

To find out more about Titchmarsh please visit www.titchmarsh.info

Thorpe Achurch

The 13th Century church, located in Achurch and in good repair, serves as the parish church for 4 villages: Achurch, Thorpe Waterville, Lilford & Wigsthorpe. It is situated in a very tranquil location and has been listed as one of the 100 best churches to visit in the county. A very popular footpath on the Nene Way leads through the churchyard. The church is opened regularly to encourage passers-by to visit.

Although the villages enjoy cordial relations, they do see themselves as individual communities and events are rarely shared: for instance, separate parties were held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. They are very small communities, so residents in each village generally know and are supportive of each other. During Covid, younger residents helped those more vulnerable or shielding with shopping, prescription collection etc. Whenever it was allowed, the church was always opened for parishioners and visitors to safely enter and use the church for private prayer.

Church congregations are generally small and mostly come from Achurch. Other villages tend to feel less connection to a church that is some distance from their home communities. Larger events, such as the Christmas Carol Service and Harvest Festival are attended by residents across the parish. We have also held Experience Christmas and Experience Easter events which attracted visitors from both the villages and the surrounding area.

We want to build on our work to encourage more people into the church. Currently, opportunities to do so are limited by the age of the building and resulting lack of facilities. An application for a faculty to install a toilet and servery has been submitted. We hope to be able to welcome more of the community for events, increasing wider participation in church.

Wadenhoe

Wadenhoe has a rural community of approximately 120 residents. While there are very few families with young children, the age range of the residents is broadly balanced between the younger residents, middle aged and retired.

The church has a small worshipping congregation for the two regular services (Communion and Evensong) every month but has a close working relationship with many non-churchgoers from the village who are always willing to help and support the church with many of the usual day-to-day tasks, such as, cleaning, providing and arranging flowers and greenery to decorate the church on special occasions and churchyard mowing. They also help with the preparation of the church for the Christmas Eve Crib Service by setting up the stable scene with the provision of a 'stable door' and straw on the floor and provide a donkey and some sheep for the crib service and the donkey which usually leads the procession up the hill into the church on Palm Sunday.

From time to time, the church is also used by some musicians from outside the Benefice for CD recording sessions of string arrangements for cello and also for violin and cello duets.

Information about the church and wider village and village hall can be found at wadenhoechurch.org.uk and at www.wadenhoetrust.org

B. Our Churches

All of the churches in the Benefice are listed and range in age from early medieval to Victorian. Visitors to our churches comment on the wonderful atmosphere of peace and friendship they experience.

Much work has been undertaken over the last twenty to thirty years and the churches are now all sound and weathertight. A great deal has been done in recent years to improve heating and lighting. Some reordering has been undertaken and there are still aspirations for further restoration and development. A sense of tradition has been maintained whilst providing for a wider range of use in some churches. We are keen to provide a welcoming environment and appreciate that further developments are required in some of our buildings. The PCCs are very active in this area and the communities (including non-churchgoers) have been very supportive.

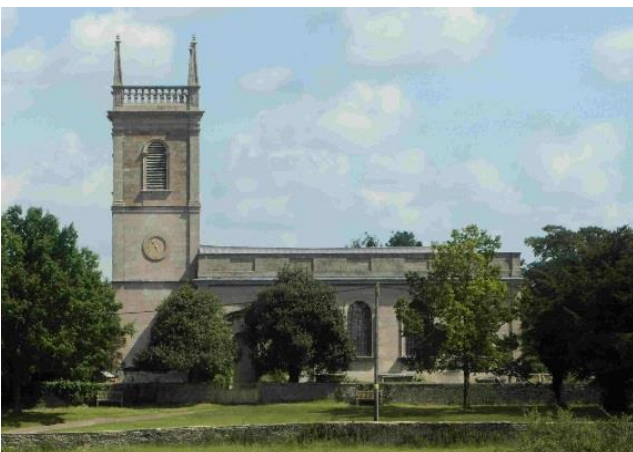
St Peter, Aldwincle



All Saints & St Mary, Pilton



St Rumbald's, Stoke Doyle



St Mary the Virgin, Titchmarsh



St Michael and All Angels, Wadenhoe



St John the Baptist, Thorpe Achurch



St Peter, Clopton



C. Aldwincle Rectory: A Place to Call Home

The Benefice Rectory is in the centre of Aldwincle – although well set back from Main Street. It is situated next to the church, playground and village hall, a short walk from the primary school and farm. The Nene Valley footpath runs along the north side of the property. The village also has a small shop and a garage although it does not sell fuel.

The house has the benefit of double glazing, loft and cavity wall insulation. Heating is provided by an oil-fired boiler with the oil tank being situated behind the large single garage. There is an open fire in the lounge and patio doors lead into the garden.

The study is a good size for parish work and is accessed immediately from the front door, although the downstairs WC is further along the hallway.

The house is in reasonable decorative order.

The living room (and patio), dining room, kitchen and 3 of the bedrooms have good views across the garden (a belt of bulbs from end to end in spring) to a field, owned by a number of near neighbours, which is used for community events and occasionally grazing sheep.

The kitchen has a galley layout with a breakfast bar and whilst narrow has good views into the garden. There is an adjoining utility room housing the boiler and a Belfast sink.

Upstairs the property has 4 bedrooms, 3 of which are a good size and all of which have good sized built-in wardrobes. The main bedroom also has a fitted sink/vanity unit. In addition to the downstairs WC there is a family bathroom upstairs, a separate WC and a separate shower room. The loft is part boarded and spacious.

The garden is large and, whilst mostly grassed, has a number of mature trees and significant hedging. It also has some wildlife friendly areas, mainly along the boundaries and under the trees. It was much enjoyed by the previous rector's grandsons. The garden has its own private gate onto the Nene Valley Way. It is only a 20 minute walk to Wadenhoe, and a few yards down the path there are stunning views across the river to most of the Benefice!



D. Our Current Services

Current regular service pattern is shown in the table below:

Time	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
9.00am	Holy Communion		Holy Communion Morning Prayer	Holy Communion	
10.30am	Holy Communion	Holy Communion	Holy Communion	Holy Communion	Holy Communion
4.00pm		Tea, cake & worship			
6.00pm		Compline	Evening Prayer	Evening Prayer	
7.30pm	Thursday Praise – online, monthly				

Holy Communion services are Common Worship.

Morning Prayer and Compline are adapted Common Worship

Evening Prayer is Prayer Book

E. Special Annual Services

Christmas - Carol services are held in all churches; Christmas Eve Crib services are held in Wadenhoe (with donkey and sheep!) and Aldwincle; Midnight Holy Communion is held in Titchmarsh and Stoke Doyle; and a Christmas morning service is held in Achurch.

A Christingle service is held each year with children from across the Benefice joining in at Titchmarsh church.

The two schools hold their own carol services in church.

Lent - Ash Wednesday is celebrated and a weekly evening Lent discussion group meets in addition to the weekly Bible Study group with breakfast.

Mothering Sunday – normally celebrated in more than one church with the giving of flowers.

Palm Sunday - A special service is held in Wadenhoe which usually includes a procession, when possible led by a donkey, up the hill into the church.

Holy Week and Easter - Maundy Thursday is kept with a Holy Communion service and supper in Titchmarsh. The three hours on the cross are marked with a service for each hour in one of the churches. Easter Day is celebrated with a Sunrise service in Wadenhoe followed by breakfast and Holy Communion in two other churches.

Attendance over Holy Week for the Benefice is usually around 250.

Patronal Festivals - Each parish celebrates its Patronal Festival.

All Souls - At All Souls-tide we hold a special Service of Memories each year to which the families and friends of those who have died in recent years are invited. This has been found to be very helpful to many people.

Remembrance Sunday - services are held in at least three churches with a service conducted at the War Memorials at Achurch, Aldwincle and on the village green in Wadenhoe, when the names of those villagers who died in the two Great Wars are read out and remembered and a wreath provided by the church is laid on the memorial in their memory. In Titchmarsh as part of the church service, names are read out, and a wreath placed on the War Memorial in the churchyard. Stoke Doyle has an evening service. Clopton has a service on Remembrance Day in the evening with one of the villagers playing the Last Post & Reveille on the bugle.

Rural specials:

Plough Sunday – has recently been added to the regular pattern of annual farming celebrations with a special service held in Stoke Doyle.

Rogation - Clopton marks rogation tide by a worship – tractor & trailer ride around the village which is well attended by the villagers. Stoke Doyle usually has an evening rogation service which is also well attended.

Lamas – is now celebrated at Stoke Doyle.

Harvest Festivals - Each parish celebrates Harvest with a thanksgiving service. Harvest suppers/lunches are linked to the services with some parishes sharing a meal. The two schools celebrate harvest by bringing the children into church to present their gifts.

Pet Service – Introduced in 2025 for the first time and proved popular.

F. Benefice Data

	Aldwinkle	Clopton*	Pilton	Stoke Doyle	Thorpe - Achurch	Titchmarsh	Wadenhoe
No. on electoral role	16		14	19	13	42	29
Average attendance in 2024	12		14	26	9	18	22
Attendance Easter 2025	Maundy Thursday – HC + Supper 28 Good Friday – 11am 12: Noon 10: 1pm 7 Sunrise Service - 6am 31 Easter HC - 10.30am Aldwinkle 45 : Titchmarsh 55						

*Clopton only celebrates special occasions so no average attendance available.

Information in the table below relates to 2024 and summarises for the Benefice

As the numbers are small they can vary significantly from year to year.

Baptisms	Marriages	Funerals
3	3	5
		2 internments of ashes
		1 Thanksgiving service

G. Youth, Children and Community Work

Schools

Titchmarsh C of E and Trinity C of E (Aldwincle) have a close relationship with the churches in their villages. Trinity school is now an academy in the Peterborough Diocesan Trust and has one church nominated governor. Titchmarsh has one foundation governor. Both schools serve the village communities and also have many children from the neighbouring towns of Thrapston and Islip as well as outlying villages.

Titchmarsh School usually holds church services 2 or 3 times a term with special services held for May Day, Leavers, Harvest Festival & Christmas. During the vacancy this has increased to twice a month. The school has also been involved in educational activities relating to the restoration of the organ and other art projects.

Trinity School celebrates Harvest, Christmas, Candlemass, Easter and end of year with a special service in church as well as other services. During the vacancy Collective Worship in school has increased to every other week lead by a reader. Who has also input into the curriculum. Since 2020 the children have made Christmas cards for the elderly and those living alone which are distributed by members of the Benefice. A recent SIAMS inspection spoke highly of the school and the relationship with the community and church.

“Experience Easter” was run over two days in Aldwincle church in 2025 with each year group from Trinity school attending. Volunteers from across the benefice helped staff each of the stations.

'Youth Worship' for all the deanery takes place in Oundle on the third Sunday evening of the month.

Benefice Youth Group

A Benefice Youth Group was established in the autumn of 2019, meeting monthly in different churches. It was organised by one of the Readers, with the assistance of two parents. It was well supported by teenagers from the Benefice and also from neighbouring villages – attendance was about 13. The group closed at lockdown and now many of the original members have moved on with pressures of exams. During the vacancy we have been unable to reform the group. Although the Reader volunteers with the Souster Youth Trust which may help in reforming the group.

Monday Morning Cafe

This takes place in Titchmarsh church and attracts people of all ages from tiny tots to the more mature in years. It was started by PCC members and village mums but now it is run by a rota of villagers.

Thursday Coffee Morning

Takes place in Aldwincle village hall jointly lead by members of the church and village. A book swap is available.

H. Benefice Groups, Activities, Communication

The Benefice has a large number of activities associated with the churches. Some are held in church as well as in nearby village halls. Each parish runs their own funding raising events and occasional benefice ones have been held.

Regular events include:

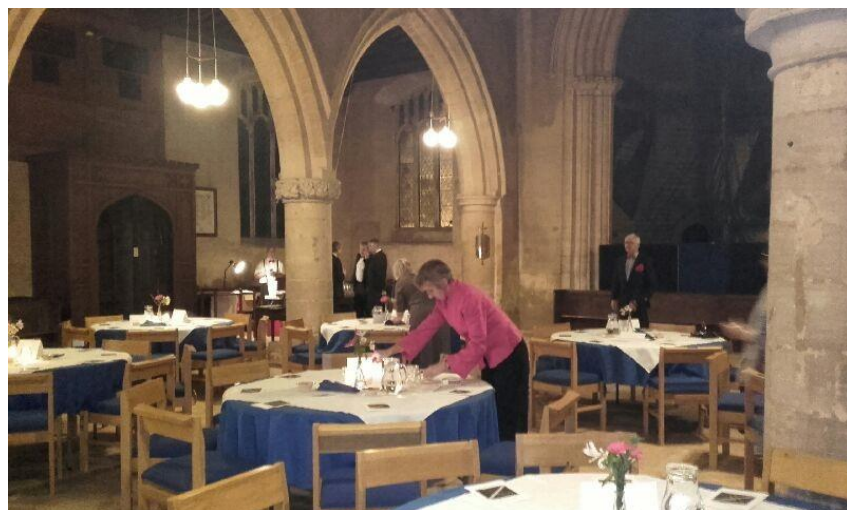
- Bible study
- Monday Morning Cafe
- Friendly Club
- WI
- Messy Church
- Forest School
- Book swaps

Annual events include:

- Fetes
- BBQs
- Rogation walks
- Christmas extravaganza
- Harvest Lunches and Suppers
- Christmas Fayres
- Big Lunch
- Concerts
- Oundle Festival - Music in Special Places
- Oundle Organ Scholars
- Quizzes
- Summer Balls

One off events:

- Birthday parties
- Wedding receptions
- Arts & Crafts exhibitions
- Fashion Shows
- Medieval evenings with ceilidhs
- Murder Mystery evenings
- Macmillan Coffee Mornings
- Tours of the Church – U3A, history groups
- Church Open days
- Open Gardens - Teas
- Wine tastings
- Singing classes & rehearsals
- Dance classes



Communications

Pink Sheet - The Benefice has a free bi-monthly church newsletter which includes a letter from the rector or ministry team, details of all church services and updates from each parish on church and non-church events. It is delivered to all households in the benefice except for Titchmarsh where copies are left in the church and the village shop.

Titchmarsh Times - is a free bi-monthly village newsletter which includes details of the services for the benefice, the rota for Titchmarsh and the rector's letter as well as local news and other articles. It is paid for by Titchmarsh Parish Council and is distributed to every house in the village.

Websites - Wadenhoe has their websites managed by a member of the congregation. Titchmarsh's website is sponsored and paid for by the Parish Council but the church content is managed by the churchwardens. All churches feature on 'A Church Near You'.

A Benefice *Facebook page* was established as the Benefice went into lockdown. This is managed by a member of the PCC, who updates services and special events. The page has a good following.

Charities we support:

Royal British Legion
Cransley Hospice
National Churches Trust
Northants Historic Churches Trust
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
The Children's Society
Thrapston Food Bank

Titchmarsh sponsors students in the Bombay Teen project which is run by the Rev Deveraj. The charity helps remove young girls and children from the red-light districts of Mumbai and gives them a safe place to live and an education, all within a Christian ethos.

I. Finances

We have knowledgeable and reliable treasurers who manage our accounts and help with increasing regular giving and claiming gift aid.

The parish share is a challenge.

The cost-of-living crisis with the increase of utility bills has direct impact on our finances and also impacts on monies coming in from fund raising as the community is stretched between church, village groups and supporting other charities.

The division of the parish share between the seven churches has always been a matter of debate and whichever formula is used there are winners and losers.

Climate change and the request that we become carbon net zero is a major concern with old boilers and electrical heating systems. We need to investigate new ways of heating our buildings without relying on fossil fuels, and these are bound to require substantial investment.

J. Ministry and Lay Teams

Benefice Ministry Team:

Carolyn Brawn – Reader, Warden of Lay Ministry (Oakham Archdeaconry)

Marilyn Percy – Reader

There are licensed Eucharistic assistants in all churches. The churchwardens of Titchmarsh are happy to take non-eucharistic services if required.

Each parish has a PCC with secretary and treasurer. Titchmarsh meets monthly with a churchwarden taking the chair. Other parishes meet less frequently with the lay vice chair taking the chair. Churchwardens and PCC members maintain the fabric of the buildings and organise any necessary rotas.

Members of the congregations, including young people, are involved in lesson reading and writing and leading intercessions.

The Benefice is very lucky to have a number of excellent organists who provide music for most services.

The Benefice takes the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults very seriously.

One Parish Safeguarding Officer, Dr Kate Hughes, covers Titchmarsh and will also cover Clopton.

One Parish Safeguarding Officer Carolyn Brawn, covers Aldwincle, Thorpe Achurch. Pilton and Wadenhoe.

One Parish Safeguarding Officer, Dawn Gent, covers Stoke Doyle.

DBS applications and checks are carried out by Kate and Carolyn.

K. Deanery Overview and Support

The Deanery of Oundle is a largely rural deanery that lies within the Archdeaconry of Oakham in the Diocese of Peterborough. It comprises 36 parishes that are organised into seven benefices with eight stipendiary clergy and many active and supportive retired clergy. There are two larger centres of population: Oundle (c6000) and Thrapston (c7000). The population of the villages range between c1200 (King's Cliffe) and c50 (Pilton).

The Rural Dean is the Rev Eddie Smith, The Deanery has a long-established culture of close partnership and common working between clergy and lay ministers. All clergy and lay ministers belong to the 'College of Ministers', our equivalent of a clergy chapter.

As we pray together and share together so we look to support and encourage one another in outreach and ministry. We want to work together to see our churches grow in numbers as people come to faith in Christ and then grow in that faith.

We are excited to be in a diocese where there is a heart to see church growth. We are seeking patterns of ministry which suit each setting.

The deanery schools are experiencing the pressure that comes with change. In September 2015 the ten Lower Schools all became Primary Schools as East Northamptonshire phased out middle schools and became 'two-tier'. Prince William School became a Secondary Academy with a Sixth Form Centre. In addition, the independent Oundle School and its feeder prep school Laxton Junior are a strong presence in Oundle town.

The Oundle Churches' Youth Association (OCYA) works with young people in schools across the whole deanery – which is also the Prince William School catchment area. A monthly Youth Worship service for young people across the deanery, and across denominations, takes place in Oundle and we benefit greatly from the support of the Diocesan youth mission enabler.

St Peter's, Oundle has a CYM (Centre for Youth Ministry) intern, working within the town, local schools and the deanery. The clergy support this work and are active within their benefice schools. A Pentecost service is held each year. Every Year 4 child in the deanery – from every school (state and independent; Church and community school alike) - attends as together we celebrate Jesus the Light of the World.

The deanery has a strong identity, a supportive college of ministers and a common desire to see our churches grow.