

PARISH CHURCH NEWS

**Ss. Peter & Paul, Clare
with St. Mary the Virgin, Poslingford**

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(*Usual Rest Day: Monday*)

The Rev'd Dr. Karen Smith

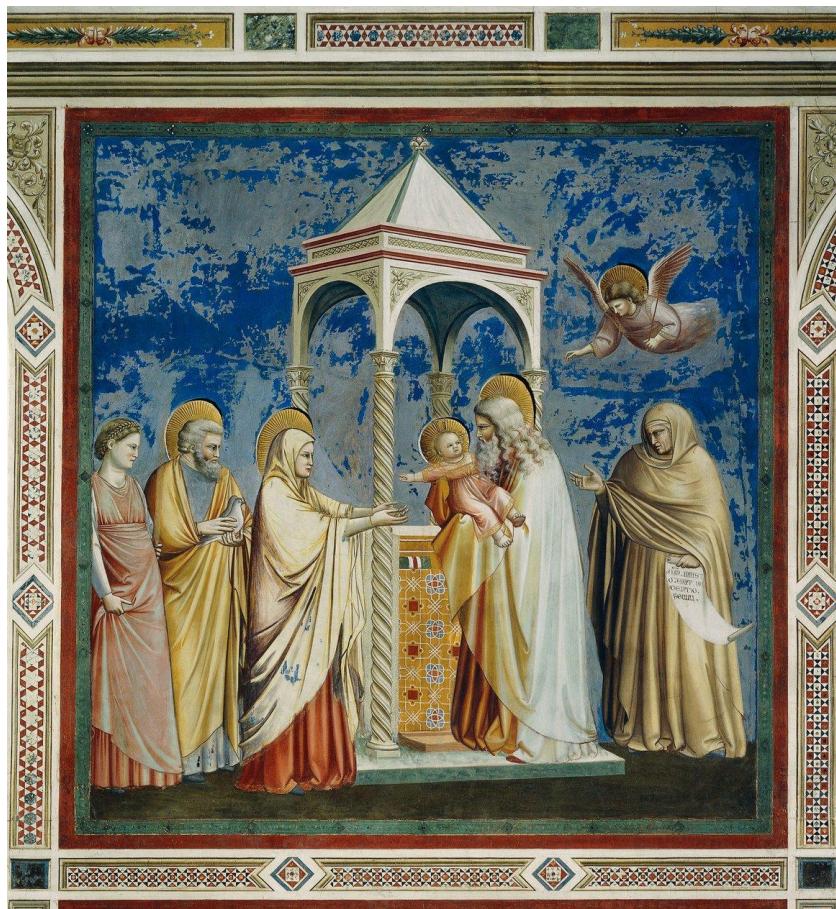
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(*Usual Rest Day: Saturday*)

No. 454

February 2026



**The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple
("Candlemas")
2nd February**

Rector's Ramblings – February 2026

(Love in the Lean Months)



By the time this magazine reaches your doormats, we will be navigating that curious, "in-between" stretch of the British year. February is often described by poets and artists as the month of "fill dyke," where the grey skies seem determined to soak the earth, and the initial excitement of the New Year has long since faded into the reality of damp mornings and early sunsets.

However, as we look at the calendar for February 2026, our eyes are naturally drawn to the 14th. High street windows are already awash with Hearts, Roses, and Teddy bears. While there is nothing wrong with celebrating romantic love, for many of us, Valentine's Day can feel a little narrow - or even isolating. This year, I want to invite us all to look beyond the roses and explore a more enduring kind of affection.

In the Christian tradition, we often speak of Agape—a Greek word for a love that is selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. This isn't the flutter of a heartbeat; it is the steady pulse of a community that looks out for its neighbours.

As we move past the 14th, we find ourselves on the threshold of a very different season. This year, Ash Wednesday falls on 18th February, marking the beginning of Lent. It is a poignant timing. If Valentine's Day is about the "highs" of affection, Lent is about the "depths" of devotion. It is a forty-day journey that asks us to strip away the distractions and focus on what truly matters.

When people think of Lent, they often think of "giving things up" - chocolate, wine, or perhaps social media. While these small acts of self-discipline are valuable, I wonder if this February we might consider a "Lent of Action." Instead of merely subtracting something from our lives, could we add something that reflects that Agape love?

- Checking in on a neighbour who rarely gets visitors.
- Volunteering an hour at the local food bank or community café.
- Committing to a daily moment of silence to reflect on our place in the world.

Lent is essentially "soul-gardening." Just as the snowdrops (those "fair maids of February") are currently pushing through the cold soil in our churchyards, Lent is the time for us to prepare the ground of our own hearts for the new life of Easter.

Life in our parish is rarely static. Beyond the quiet reflection of Lent, we have much to look forward to (check the Benefice website for details!)

As we walk through this month together—through the rain, the mud, and the occasional burst of pale winter sunshine - let us remember that we are never walking alone. Whether you are celebrating a long-term romance or finding this time of year particularly quiet, you are a valued thread in the fabric of this parish and community.

May the peace of the season be with you all.

Mark

The Rev'd Mark Woodrow
(Rector)

**FROM THE REGISTERS
JANUARY 2026**

FUNERALS



Karen Flack



From Pancakes to Penance: Finding Meaning in the Ashes

If you've walked past the vicarage recently, you might have caught the faint scent of something burning. No, it wasn't a culinary disaster; it was the preparation of the ashes we use for Ash Wednesday (18th February).

There is a profound, cyclical beauty in the fact that the ashes we use on Ash Wednesday come from the burnt palm crosses of the previous year's Palm Sunday. We take the symbols of last year's celebration and transform them into the dust of our repentance.

The Symbolism of the Smudge

For those unfamiliar with the tradition, "ashing" involves the priest marking a cross on the forehead with the words: *"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."* It's a bit of a "stop-and-stare" moment in our modern world. In an era obsessed with youth, productivity, and "living your best life," Ash Wednesday is a radical reality check.

The ashes serve two primary purposes:

- A Sign of Mortality: They remind us that our time on this earth is finite. This isn't meant to be morbid; rather, it's a grounding exercise. When we acknowledge our frailty, we can better appreciate the gift of life.
- A Sign of Repentance: Historically, ashes were a public mark of mourning and sorrow for sin. By wearing them, we acknowledge that we aren't perfect and that we need God's grace to set us right.

Why Do We Bother?

You might wonder why we start the season of Lent on such a sombre note. Why not just jump straight to the chocolate eggs? Well, the purpose of Ash Wednesday is to hit the "spiritual reset button." It marks the beginning of the forty days of Lent, mirroring Jesus' time in the wilderness. It is a season of "holy spring cleaning" for the soul. By stripping away the noise - and perhaps a few luxuries - we create space to hear God more clearly.

The smudge on our foreheads is eventually washed off, but the mark it leaves on our hearts is meant to stay. It's an invitation to spend the next six weeks traveling toward the cross of Good Friday and, ultimately, the empty tomb of Easter.

When you join us for our special **Ash Wednesday service at 7pm on 18th February in St Mary's Church in Poslingford**, you will be invited to receive the ashes, we don't do so in despair. We wear them as a badge of honesty, acknowledging our need for a Saviour and our commitment to a deeper walk of faith.



The PCC (now fourteen-strong) had a full agenda to deal with at its recent meeting on 23 January, the most important points of which (in addition to the perennial question of finance) may be summarised as follows: A number of paintings has been offered to the church. Nothing is known about them at this stage, but Nicholas Turner will be looking at them in due course, so that more information may be available later.

Remedial/supplementary work on the two Vicars Boards at Clare and Poslingford is to be undertaken in the not too distant future.

Mr. Christopher Moore has very kindly offered to organise a further season of *Coffee Concerts* for 2026. Last year's occasions were a great success and details of this year's will be advertised as soon as a programme has been arranged.

Work on restoration of the Parclose Screen in the South aisle will commence on 7th April, while the major project of re-lighting the church is scheduled to start on 16th February. This latter work is expected to take around four weeks. Any closures of the building while this is in progress will be kept to a minimum.

The search for the missing Visitors Book continues. If anyone has seen it, please let us know!

Mrs. Christina Glover is now retiring from the organisation of the Christmas Fair and someone will be needed to deal with prospective stallholders (*viz.* bookings, payments, allocation of stalls, etc.). Volunteers for this important task should contact Mark or churchwarden David.

Finally, the Annual Parochial Church Meeting will be held after the morning service on **Sunday, 26th April**.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

A service for everyone!

Friday 6 March

I will give you rest, come

Friday 6th March, is the World Day of Prayer. The service this year is prepared by the women of Nigeria on the theme 'I will give you rest, come'.

There are 3 main tribal areas in Nigeria: the Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the south west and the Igbo in the south east. Christianity has had a major impact on the values of the developing healthcare and education, especially in the east. Northern areas are largely Muslim and today Christians are persecuted in that area especially by Boko Haram.

Women in Nigeria are still regarded as second class citizens. A married woman is effectively her husband's property. Should her husband die, all property and land owned by the husband is likely to be seized by the husband's family and the woman left with nothing.

There will be a service in the United Reformed Church at 10.30am on 6th March. All are welcome. I will be looking for volunteers to read parts of the service, which is all laid out in the service booklet.

Jayne Drinkwater

I will give you rest

When the storms are blowing and the waves are rising

I will give you rest

When the bills are rising and your health is failing

I will give you rest.

When the children are screaming and the spouse is dreaming

I will give you rest.

When the jobs are done and all ideas are gone

God says I will give you rest

When wars are raging and hearts are breaking

God says I will give you rest

*When all earthly help has gone
God simply says 'Give them to me'
I, Jehovah Sabaoth will give you rest.*

Pastor Margaret Forrester



Happy New Year everyone. 2026 has been designated the National Year of Reading with the slogan: Go All In. Various reading charities, including The Reading Agency where I am Vice Chair of the Board, are currently working on programmes to maximise the potential of this campaign. The Times and The Sunday Times have also begun a campaign, Get Britain Reading, to encourage people to read for 10 minutes a day.

Last year, the largest study into the reading habits of young people, undertaken by the National Literacy Trust, revealed that there is a deeply worrying decline in their reading for pleasure, with less than a fifth of 8–18 year-olds reading something daily in their free time.

We at The Reading Agency found in our research that while millions of adults are reading every day (53% up from 50% in 2024), at least half refuse to call themselves readers. We believe that all reading in all formats is valid, this includes audiobooks, magazines, comics, fiction and non-fiction, physical books and e readers. Our underpinning strapline is: Because Everything Changes When You Read.

This has made me reflect on what reading has meant for me. As a Librarian in the public sector for twenty-five years, I felt blessed every day to be paid to do my hobby and my passion. Now a Friend of Clare Library, I still feel strongly that our library service is so valuable to our society, providing the most wonderful supply of books and helping us navigate the pitfalls of the digital society, providing access to verified and verifiable information and driving intellectual freedom and critical thinking.

As an only child growing up in rainy Lancashire in the 60s and 70s, reading was my ticket to worlds that delighted and inspired me. That love of reading has had a

profound effect on my life, my education and my choice of career and I have made so many friends because of it.

We live in a society which is so frenetic that taking time to read and immerse yourself in another world is something that we are finding increasingly hard to do, but the benefits are so wide-ranging. Reading enables you to walk a mile in another's shoes, it fosters empathy and understanding and encourages you to reflect rather than respond in an impulsive, knee jerk way. I also remember a programme that the BBC did about 20 years ago with Rosie Thomas who proved that reading a Georgette Heyer novel raised the serotonin levels in her blood with all the benefits that that brings.

To misquote Jane Austen, it is a truth universally acknowledged that if a child is read to, sees their parents reading and grows up in a house with books in it, they too will become readers. There is a growing amount of evidence that reading to your child is the single best thing you can do in terms of fostering closeness, sharing wonder and excitement and stimulating their imagination. Now, with 4 grandchildren, I see that every time I read them a bedtime story or curl up on the sofa and read to them.

Both my parents were readers. From a very early age on Wednesday evenings, I went with my father to Burnley Library after tea to choose some books. I wanted books by Enid Blyton, but her stories were as rare as hen's teeth and so, helped by the children's librarian, I discovered other books and authors that delighted me. Today's library staff can help open the doors to the most wonderful writing that is available today for children and young people.

The library was like a treasure trove and those visits started a lifelong love of reading which has been a keystone for me since those early days in rainy Lancashire with very little television and no Internet or social media. Even now I feel the sense of excitement and anticipation that I get when a book I have been waiting for arrives at the library for me, or I buy it and it is there, like a fantastic meal, for me to devour.

And don't forget: membership of Suffolk Community Libraries gives you access to all their stock for **free**, reservations are **free**, books you request will be shipped to a library of your choice for **free** and all e-books and audiobooks borrowed through your local library are also **free**!! You can also have access to all of Cambridgeshire Libraries' stock for a £2.00 reservation fee.

In addition, you can make recommendations to the library service that they buy a book. What a service!

And I cannot finish this article without a huge shout out for our wonderful Indie Bookshop here in Clare: Harris and Harris, for those of you who want to own your books or buy presents for others. They not only have a great selection, but they

will also order anything that they don't have that is in print and available. And Kate's Instagram reel, "What's In the Box Mrs Harris" is a brilliant source of new reading material to delight.

Over the coming year, I would like to share with you some of the books that I enjoy and reflect on the development of all the work around the National Year of Reading, but for the moment I would like to leave you with the following challenges: if you are *not* a member of your local library, please do go and join and explore the wonders on their shelves and if you are, please encourage at least one person you know who is not to join.

With your library ticket in hand, set yourself the challenge of reading at least one book a month simply for pleasure.

So, finally, to pinch a catchphrase from another passion of mine, Strictly Come Dancing, just "Keeeeeeeep Reading".

Sue Williamson



Tea, Tigers, and Mother Teressa 11th -26th February 2027

Revd Mark will be leading his next small group tour back to North East India, for a 16-day exploration of Kolkata, Assam and Darjeeling – As well as excursions to Tea Plantations, the highlight for most will be a 7-day river cruise along the Brahmaputra River and through the world renowned Kaziranga National Park home to Royal Bengal Tigers and One Horned Rhino.

Price: £5,400 per person (based on 2 people sharing Room/Berth)
Single Supplement: £1,970

More information to follow soon. Places strictly limited.



Beginning Wednesday 25th February 2026 (for 5 weeks) – 10am-Noon – Clare

Lent Course - "The Things He Carried" is being led by The Revd Liz Paxton based on the Archbishop of York, The Most Revd Stephen Cottrell's book "The Things He Carried"

The Lent Course will be held in a private home, so spaces are limited to 8 people. For more information or to reserve your space please contact Revd Liz on revlizpaxton@gmail.com



Saturday 28th February 2026 – 9.30am to 4pm - Wingfield Barns, Nr Diss IP21 5RA

Fieldwork: Celebrating Rural Mission and Ministry in Suffolk - Join this Diocesan day conference for church members, PCC members, those in our church schools, lay ministers and clergy from our rural parishes.

We will hear from a great keynote speaker, the Revd Jo Neary – Tutor in Rural Ministry and Mission (part-time) at Sarum College, Salisbury, alongside her part-

time post as team vicar and pioneer priest in the Beaminster Area Team in Wiltshire, who will encourage us to think about the distinctive identity, calling and potential of the rural church. There will be time to share our stories of joy and challenge, and be encouraged and inspired.

It is being organised by rural ministers with the help of Diocesan staff and is free to attend. Reserve your place:

<https://insight.cofesuffolk.org/courses-events-and-resources/fieldwork/>



THE MOON

The moon has a face like the clock in the hall;
She shines on thieves on the garden wall,
On streets and fields and harbour quays,
And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees,
The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,
The howling dog by the door of the house,
The bat that lies in bed at noon,
All love to be out by the light of the moon.
But all of the things that belong to the day
Cuddle to sleep to be out of the way;
And flowers and children close their eyes
Till up in the morning the sun shall rise.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

Stour Valley Benefice - Services for February 2026

Sunday, 1st February

Candlemas (The Presentation of Christ in the Temple)

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>

Sunday, 8th February

Second Sunday before Lent

Hundon	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
Clare:	16:00	Evensong	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>

Sunday, 15th February

Sunday before Lent

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Liz Paxton</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by Mrs Barbara Hill</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Liz Paxton</i>
Poslingford:	16:00	Evening Prayer	<i>Led by Mrs Sarah Smith</i>

Wednesday, 18th February

Ash Wednesday

Poslingford	19:00	Holy Communion & Ashing	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
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Sunday, 22nd February

The First Sunday of Lent

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by Mrs Sarah Smith</i>
Wixoe:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
Clare:	11:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Hundon:	16:00	Evening Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>

Sunday, 1st March

The Second Sunday of Lent

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>

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