

SPOKEN - APCM Priest in Charge's report, 2025

This past year has been a significant one in the life of our churches, marked above all by the formation of the **Milborne Benefice**, which became effective on 1st April 2025. Our focus throughout the year has been on bringing together the churches of **Blackford, Compton Pauncefoot, and Maperton** with **Milborne Port, Milborne Wick, Goathill, and Charlton Horethorne with Stowell**, and on welcoming **Goathill into the Parish of Milborne Port**.

I am very thankful to say that this has felt like the coming together of a blended family. Across the benefice there has been generosity, patience, and a genuine willingness to work together. Benefice services, particularly in **Compton Pauncefoot, Goathill, and Blackford**, have helped us grow in confidence as one benefice, and the **Easter Concert in Compton Pauncefoot** was a particular highlight.

Alongside our regular worship, it has been encouraging to see new and continuing initiatives flourish. **Little Jays**, the baby and toddler group in Milborne Port, has already become well established, supported by helpers from across the benefice. The **Julian Group** offers a weekly space of quiet prayer, while **Memory Lane**, our café-church-style service for those living with memory impairment and their carers, has been warmly received.

Pastoral ministry has remained central to our life together. We regularly take **Home Communion** to people in their homes, and to **Gainsborough House Chapel, Elliscombe House, and Elliscombe Park**. This year also saw a greatly increased number of **funerals**, particularly in Milborne Port, as we lost some of the real stalwarts of our churches — people who were also our friends. Alongside this, we have continued to celebrate **baptisms and weddings**, and it has been a pleasure to offer **Marriage Preparation**, including sessions held at **The Clockspire**.

Our engagement with children and young people remains strong. I lead **weekly Collective Worship** in our Church of England school, supported by the involvement of parishioners as Chair of Governors and in weekly singing sessions. **Open the Book** continues in both **Charlton Horethorne and Milborne Port schools** twice each term, and I am grateful to all involved in this faithful ministry.

In Milborne Port, **Morning Prayer** continues daily, and the wider life of the church has been enriched by the **Choral Lenten Compline, weekly Lent Lunches**, and a very successful **Tuesday Lunch Club**. Advent and Christmas were marked by welcoming the village into church for the **Christmas Light Switch-On**, and by the installation of the **Star mobile**, created by parishioners across the benefice.

Behind the scenes, I am grateful to **Helen Solomon** for keeping the benefice office running smoothly, to **Graham Sharpless** for maintaining our website, and to those exploring improved **Facebook and online engagement**. We also marked the retirement of the **Vergers in Milborne Port**, thanking them for many years of devoted service.

On a personal note, I would like to say how much I have enjoyed getting to know the churches of **Blackford, Compton Pauncefoot, and Maperton**. They have brought great richness to the life and witness of this benefice, and it has been a joy to see us growing together.

Looking Ahead

As we look to the year ahead, our focus will be on **continuing to grow together as a benefice** — supporting one another, leading worship faithfully, and building communities rooted in God's love. We look forward to **Confirmation classes**, leading to a **Confirmation service in Milborne Port on 1st August**, as well as continuing our work with **baptisms, weddings, funerals, and marriage preparation**. During Lent, we have **two gatherings to reflect together on the Lent devotional**, and we are especially excited to be looking at when we can offer **The Bible Course**, running in **three locations and at three different times**, making it accessible to as many people as possible.

I remain thankful for the faithfulness, generosity, and resilience across our churches, and I look forward with hope to all that God will continue to do among us.