



Vicar - Warmley, Syston and Bitton Benefice



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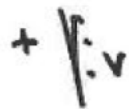
# LETTER FROM BISHOP VIV

The Benefice of Warmley, Syston and Bitton, which I visited recently, is a benefice where parish ministry has been cherished and developed under an experienced, prayerful and pastoral incumbent and there are considerable signs of developing mission and ministry. There is planned new housing which will bring scope for further innovation particularly amongst children and young people.

As the churchwardens indicate, the parishes are at an early stage of forming a benefice (rather than parish) approach, and I will be looking for an incumbent who, given the support of the diocesan strategy (Transforming Church.Together) and the investment which flows from it, will lead and empower lay officers and others to collaborate across the benefice in following Jesus, serving others and transforming community.

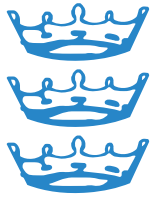
The Diocese of Bristol has the benefits of small dioceses with strong mutual regard amongst clergy, growing lay capability and respect and support for differing, locally formed ways of being church. These parishes, which sit between Bristol and the Cotswolds and on the edge of Gloucestershire bordering Wiltshire and Somerset, have considerable potential and I will be looking for an incumbent who will revel in our diocesan culture and its values of openness, bravery, generosity and creativity.

If you are attracted by what is conveyed by this profile, the Archdeacon of Malmesbury would be delighted to explore the possibility further with you.



Rt Revd Vivienne Faull  
Bishop of Bristol





# THE DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

## HUMANITY RECONCILED CREATION RESTORED

The Diocese of Bristol is presided over by the Bishop of Bristol, The Right Reverend Vivienne Faull. The Bishop of Bristol is supported by the Suffragan Bishop of Swindon, the Right Reverend Neil Warwick. The Venerable Christopher Bryan is the Archdeacon of Malmesbury and the Venerable Becky Waring, Archdeacon of Bristol. The Reverend Adam Beaumont is the Associate Archdeacon.

***Transforming Church. Together (TCT)*** its vision: Humanity Reconciled, Creation Restored. It began in 2021 with an extended period of listening to God and to one another. People from across the Diocese joined in conversations and online questionnaires to share experiences of faith, society and the church, and to discuss hopes for the future. From these conversations, four guiding values were discerned: Creativity, Openness, Bravery and Generosity.

Those values inspired a vision and strategy which seeks transformation across the whole Diocese by the grace of

God. Each Deanery and Benefice is encouraged to work out what TCT means in their particular context – the same principles can inspire and develop mission in very different ways. With major financial support from the national church, the Diocese is offering support and resources in key priority areas of ministry. These include:

- Enabling parishes to discern vision and implement plans
- Help for benefices with evangelism, discipleship plans and resources
- Training, coaching and support for teams setting up and running Fresh Expressions
- Support for ministerial wellbeing and vocation. Each incumbent will receive bimonthly coaching sessions, with additional support for those new to their post.
- Enhanced provision for volunteer training and administering safeguarding

- Increased capacity in the Diocesan office to support parishes with the care and improvement of church buildings
- Investing to become a Net Zero Diocese by 2030
- Overcoming barriers to faith by addressing the church's history on racial justice and diversity
- Developing partnerships between the church at various levels and local councils, businesses etc
- Investment in work with under 18s through school chaplaincy, youth interns and workers
- Investment in deprived parishes, church plants/grfts and new Mission Areas

This is a huge, exciting, and sometimes frightening vision, which we can only attempt in the strength Jesus supplies through his Spirit.

### **Diocesan Support Service**

The Diocesan Support Services exist to support the mission of the church. Based at the Diocesan Office to the north of Bristol and made up of 50 employees and volunteers, the DSS serve ministers, parishes and schools by expressing vision, strengthening relationships, empowering people, maximizing resources and developing structures. We offer training, consultancy, advice in a range of areas, highlight and share best practice across the Diocese and manage different aspects of the life of the Diocese.



# MESSAGE FROM THE AREA DEANS

Greetings from Bristol!

The deaneries in the diocese are very varied and the Warmley, Bitton and Syston Benefice is part of a deanery that lies almost totally within Kingswood and South Gloucestershire Local Authority (KSG) – although people do see themselves as part of Greater Bristol. This is particularly true in Warmley which is mainly a suburban community. Bitton is very much a village in and of itself between Bristol and Bath and the hamlet of Syston is right on the fringe of Bristol.

The deanery is predominantly suburban becoming more rural to the northeast. There are large areas of newer housing constructed in the last 20 -30 years. Along with those are areas of much more recent housing, including many that are still in construction, and future building is planned in other places across the deanery – particularly in this benefice. Thus our population is growing rapidly.

There are currently 37 licensed clergy in the KSG Deanery and this includes 10 SSM clergy. There are 14 benefices. We are a wide range of churches and traditions. There are some larger churches (over 200+) and some much smaller ones arranged in a belt around North and East Bristol. It is a popular place for people to live.

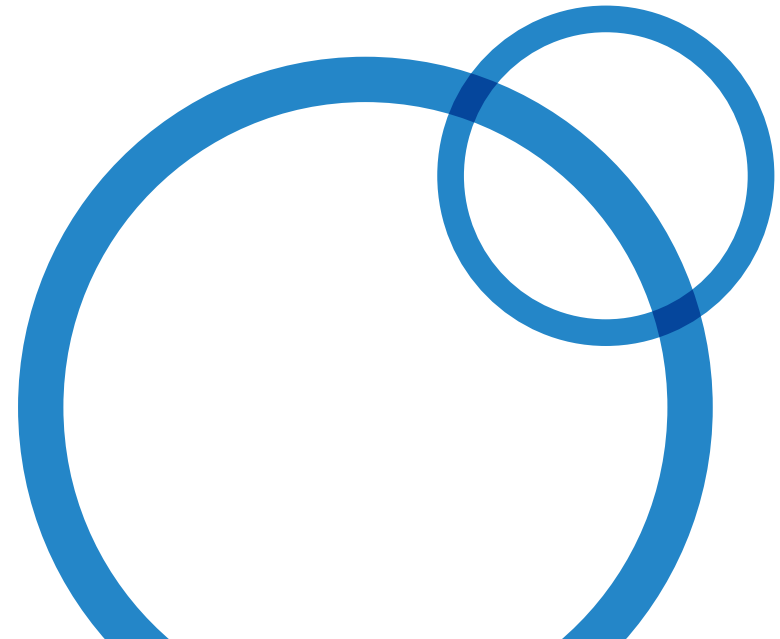
This is an exciting time to join the deanery as we begin to implement our new diocesan vision at deanery and parish level, incorporating our values of openness, generosity, creativity and bravery. These values are being worked out in a changing culture, where climate change, racial justice, as well as equality and diversity are important.

The priority for the churches in the deanery is to continue to share the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ, whilst remaining faithful to the Scriptures. It is also to grow our churches younger for the benefit of future generations. How this is done varies from church to church.

We usually meet monthly together as clergy (and LLMs sometimes) for Deanery Chapter located around the different churches, where we share informally over lunch, worship and pray together and sometimes welcome an invited guest to speak. We also offer an annual Quiet Day and share a Christmas lunch together.

Kingswood and South Gloucestershire is a great deanery to be a part of and belong to!

[Rev. Bruce Goodwin and Rev. Dave Brae –  
Co-Area Deans for KSG Deanery](#)





# LETTER FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS & PCCS

A warm welcome to the Benefice. Thank you for taking an interest in our search for a Vicar. We hope that this information will help you to decide if God is calling you in ministry to lead our benefice and help us to grow.

We approach our search for a new Vicar with a sense of excited anticipation and an open mind. We are looking for a Vicar who will help us lift our presence and impact in our parishes, building faith, care, and community strength, and that the person who comes to our Benefice will be happy living and ministering in a combination of urban and rural settings, between Bristol and Bath, so that together all can develop and grow in faith.

We do not wish to over-prescribe our vision of who our new incumbent will be, but we do need a leader with drive and energy and a passion for the role. Someone who will enthusiastically engage in community events and be able to face outwards towards our local communities in line with the Diocesan strategy of Transforming Church Together. We have a determination to attract the younger generation with new expressions of worship as well as continue to deliver a more traditional form.

We are an active Benefice of three parishes and, from the profiles that follow, you will see that each of our parishes have specific characteristics.

There are also important common features and values which we all share, and which help to define our Benefice.

Please explore the following pages to get a feel for who we are. We hope that this will spark a connection that leads you to want to dig deeper and that you will respond positively to our advertisement. Whatever the outcome, you will be treated with love and respect throughout the process. We will be thrilled to receive applications and look forward to forging a close working partnership with our new Vicar.

Yours sincerely,

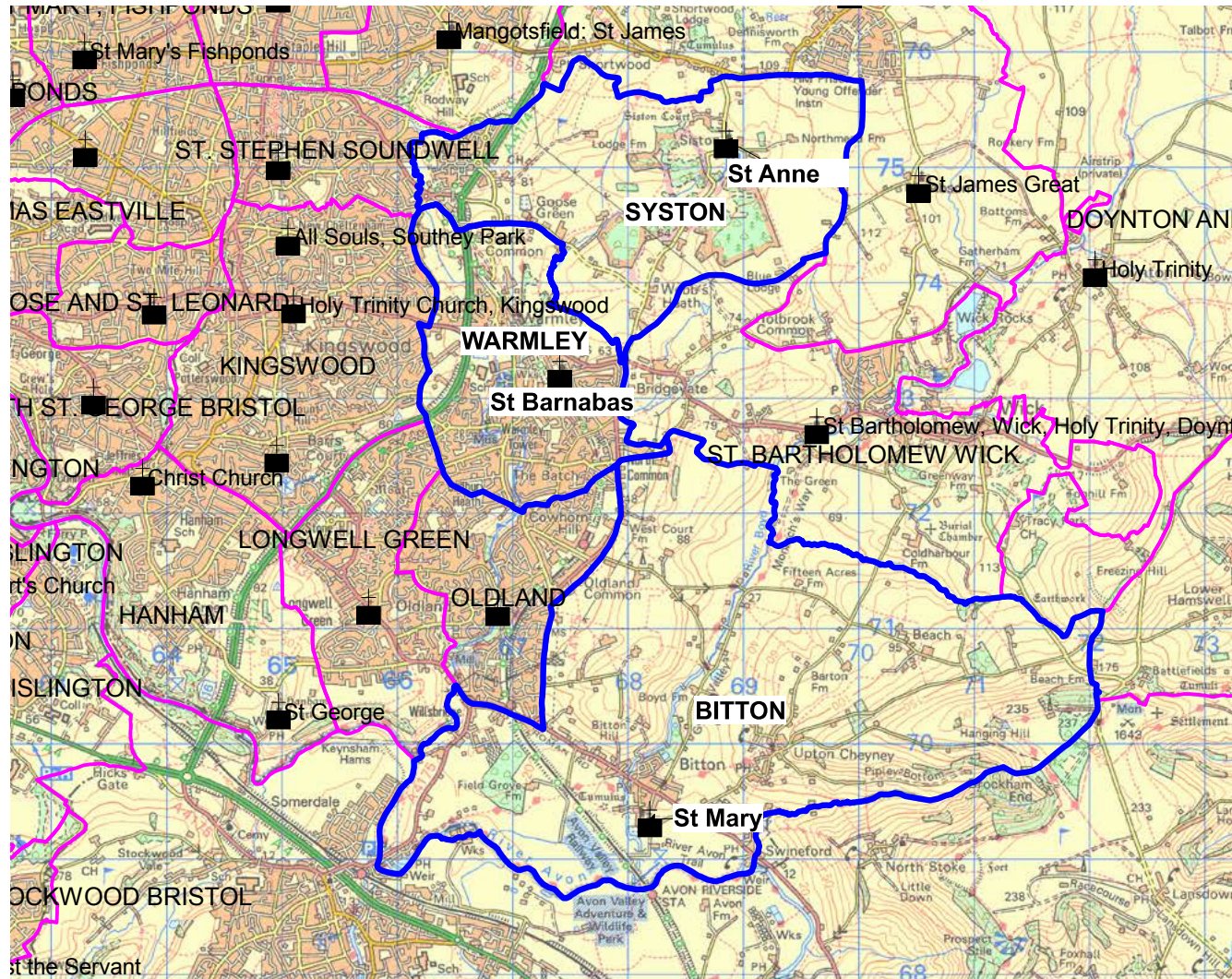
Mary, Simon, Sheila and Sally

The Benefice Church Wardens



# INTRODUCTION TO THE BENEFICE

We are a benefice of three parishes, St. Barnabas, Warmley, St. Anne's, Syston, and St. Mary's Bitton nestled between Bristol and Bath.





The three churches are different in both age and in their local communities. Both St Anne's and St Mary's have been there for a thousand years whereas St Barnabas is more modern in architecture having been built in the middle of the 19th century. The communities too are different: Bitton and Syston are in largely rural and commuting communities, while Warmley is an outer suburb of Bristol.

All of the parish populations are growing year-on-year with considerable new development underway and planned. These substantial areas of new housing will require a strategic approach working with the Deanery and Diocese. Each church has its own style of service and its own feel and atmosphere serving the needs of all including those with special needs, the very young, and the elderly. Each of the parishes has their own challenges and opportunities which are covered in greater detail in the parish sections but we share clergy, administration and a joint determination to grow and to thrive.

The present ministry team comprises four ordained clergy:

[Rev Rosemary Radcliffe](#) – Curate in Charge (self-supporting)

[Rev Richard Humphrey](#) – Ordained local minister,

[Rev Jillianne Norman](#) - Hospital Chaplain with PtO

[Rev Huw Davies](#) - Permission to Officiate

And four Licensed Lay Ministers (Lay Readers)

[Ken Gibson](#), [David Bailey](#), [Leslie Willcox](#), [John Sibley](#)

The team are used to leading worship in any of the benefice churches.



# WHAT WE DO WELL TOGETHER

The churches actively encourage community participation with various weekday social activities in the churches and the church halls. The benefice ministry team and the congregations are supportive of all three churches and their respective communities.

When we have a fifth Sunday we hold a joint benefice service and we regularly support events organised by one or other of the churches, Other joint services are held on Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Ascension Day. House groups are organised across the benefice with an agreed programme aiming to coordinate the deepening of faith and fellowship. Prayer Breakfasts are held once a month in one of the churches.

Recent years have seen the benefice PCCs working to ensure, as best we can, that Parish Share for the benefice is met with mutual recognition of relative financial strength. There is church engagement with three of the schools across the benefice using key benefice clergy, who maintain a positive relationship.

We have a joint benefice calendar which is widely circulated so that activities are publicised as broadly as possible with recognition of church bookings and ad-hoc commitments as well as a grid to show who is leading which service, where and when.

Syston and Warmley have a joint monthly magazine whilst Bitton runs its own. We have a part-time administrator who works under the direction of the incumbent (curate whilst in vacancy) and the previous vicar put together a 'church manual' to capture the various processes that describe how the benefice works. Each parish helps support the others where we can such as Syston's 12 Days of Christmas and Bitton's music group, The Minstrels playing in our other churches.





# OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We want to welcome a younger generation, enabling them to encounter Christ's love and to grow in discipleship. We want to serve the needs of our established parishioners who continue to sustain the churches through their support. We are mindful that the 3 parishes in our Benefice differ in geography and population, but in-line with the Diocesan Transforming Churches Together (TC.T) strategy we are working closely together to ensure that our churches are both environmentally and financially sustainable for generations to come.

Therefore, rather than just focusing inwardly, we are seeking ways to bring the Gospel to our wider communities by looking at different forms of outreach such as Café Church held at Bitton which attracts younger parents and their children, Rise and Shine and Eco-Church and Community Garden at St Barnabas and using the peaceful setting of St Anne's Syston for Festival talks and Quiet Days.

We share skills developed in different areas to enhance our Benefice in a way

that might appeal to those that may not attend regular forms of worship at the same time as demonstrating our faith in the everyday lives of our whole community. An example is in fundraising techniques, where Bitton's success in financing an ambitious re-ordering programme has been shared with the other churches.

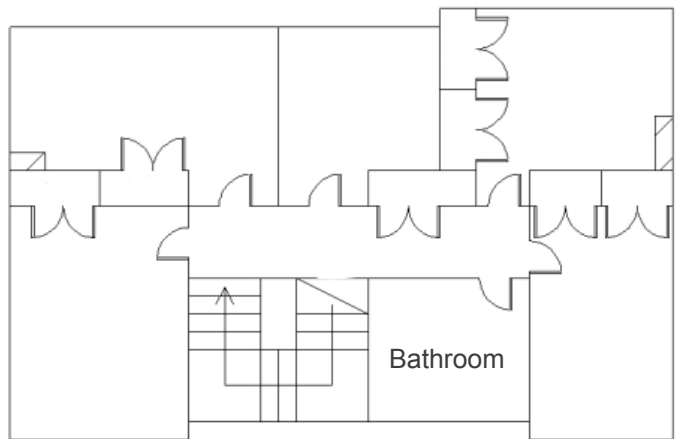


# THE VICARAGE

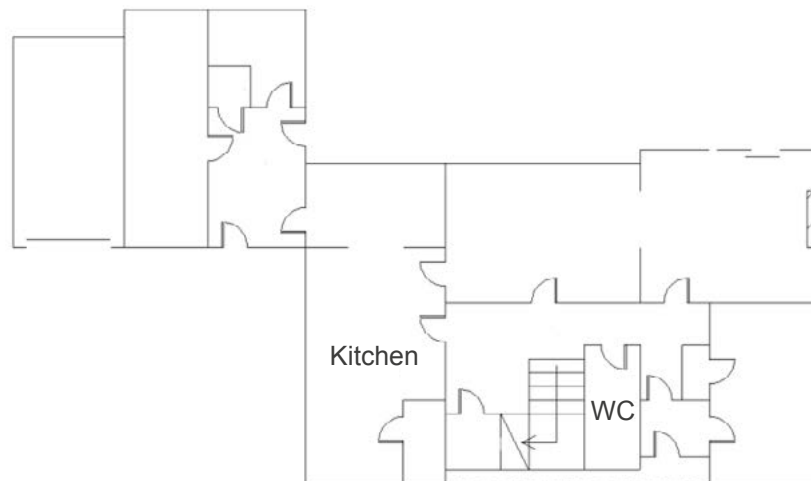
The vicarage is roughly in the middle of the benefice, adjacent to St. Barnabas Church in Warmley. It was built in the early 1970's and stands in its own extensive grounds.

The accommodation consists of five bedrooms, bathroom, lounge, dining room, study, kitchen, utility room, downstairs cloakroom and there is a single garage and ample parking.

The vicarage has photovoltaics, cavity wall insulation and top-up loft insulation as part of our diocesan commitment to Carbon Net Zero.



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



# ST. BARNABAS' CHURCH, WARMLEY

Do visit us to experience the warmth of the welcome, the sincerity of the people and the breadth and depth of our worship. We seek always to embrace the growth of our own faith and to support that of others.

Warmley is a semi-rural outer suburb of Bristol with a population of approximately 10,000 that continues to grow year on year. It is predominantly a dormitory for Bristol and Bath. The housing is mostly owner occupied or rented and there are a number of residential care homes and supported living establishments. There are several small light industrial and commercial estates.

The local community is very established with a smaller than average transient population. The Church has potential for strong and effective links throughout the social and business life in the area. Kingswood Heritage Museum is an award winning museum which is based in the Parish and reflects the mining and agricultural history of the area.

There is easy access to sports and leisure facilities and a retail shopping centre. The popular Bristol to Bath Cycle Path (part of the National Cycle Network) runs through the Parish. Kingswood Forest Park provides the community with a large open space for nature lovers. There is also a thriving Community Centre which hosts the annual village pantomime. Grimsby Community Farm which is supported by South Glos. Council is another well used amenity.

We are just off the A420 about 7 miles from both Bristol and Bath. There is easy access to both the M4 and the M5 motorways. The full address is Church Avenue, Warmley, Bristol BS30 5JJ.



We are a Christian community seeking to discover the heart of God in the community of Warmley. We believe that faith in Jesus is for everyday life.

We have a pastoral coordinator. As part of our commitment to the Transforming Church. Together vision, we are beginning to explore Anna Chaplaincy as a way of developing how we support the Spirituality of older people whatever the depth of their faith.

During Lent and occasionally through the year groups meet in the Benefice for Bible study and exploring the Christian faith. Currently there is an opportunity for Bible Study and fellowship following the Wednesday 10.30 Holy Communion Service.

To assist the prayer life of the parish a monthly prayer cycle enables us to pray regularly for every street in the parish, for various charities we support, for the Church and the parish.

Our monthly Healing and Wholeness service offers prayer for healing and anointing. Additionally, we have a trained team who offer prayer ministry after our Prayer and Praise service which is also held once per month.

On Remembrance Sunday, a Service is led by the church and held in Warmley Memorial Park. This is attended by Civic leaders, uniformed groups and the general public. Attendance normally averages 400.





## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Rise and Shine

“Rise and Shine” is a cafe style service which focusses on sharing the message of Jesus with young families and those who prefer a more informal style of worship. We aim to create a relaxed atmosphere into which newcomers can be made welcome alongside long-standing members of our congregation. The service’s theme usually links with the Lectionary and children participate in crafts and worship songs. For our prayer time all are invited to contribute their prayer requests which are later added to the prayer board.



Vicar - Warmley, Syston and Bitton Benefice

## SCHOOLS IN THE PARISH

The following schools lie within the parish:

- St. Barnabas Church of England Primary School
- Warmley Park School and College
- Cadbury Heath Primary School
- Kings Oak Academy Primary + Secondary
- Digitech Studio School
- Neptune Independent School catering for additional needs

There are also 2 large Pre-Schools:

- Warmley Pre-School
- Pandemonium Pre-School

St Barnabas’ Church currently has strong links with the Church Primary School and Warmley Park School and College in the following ways:

### St Barnabas CofE Primary School

We currently have a very supportive and active Foundation Governor who would welcome the opportunity to work alongside a Vicar who is willing to engage with acts of Collective Worship at the school and also support church visits:



The Headteacher wishes this link to continue:

“As a Church of England Primary school we value community and list it as one of the key drivers for our curriculum. We visit church termly as a whole school and perform at Christmas and Easter. We would love to welcome a new member into our school who could create the connections and relationships with staff, pupils and families”.

## Warmley Park School and College

As a result of Eco Church we have a strong link with Warmley Park School and College. A group of students aged 16 -18 visit the church weekly to garden and help clear and maintain the churchyard.

During the growing season of 2024 some students and church took part in growing produce together as part of the Hazlenut Community Farm Golden Turnip Challenge and as such won this competition:

*“Congratulations to St Barnabas Church and Warmley Park College! Winner of the 2024 Golden Turnip Challenge. “A huge round of applause to the dedicated participants for their incredible teamwork and hard work in the garden! This achievement is a testament to the power of community collaboration and the beauty of growing together”*

(Hazelnut Community Farm)

St Barnabas have also developed regular school/college visits to the church for key festivals such as Easter and Christmas time and this is valued by all:

*“The link for us as a local specialist education provider with St Barnabas is invaluable. The link provides a tangible connection for us with a local faith establishment, but beyond that it really does provide an outstanding and very real community connection. The life of both church and school are valued by each, but the genuine relationship between people groups is the real blessing for all involved. Real people do real things...together.”*

(Head of Warmley Park College)





## CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

There is a social committee to oversee events such as monthly tea and cakes in the church hall, Summer Fayre, Autumn Fayre and Christmas Party plus occasional events in the church or local community.



## ECO CHURCH

St Barnabas' Church has received a Bronze Award from A Rocha and are now in the process of applying for a Silver Award. 2 nominated Eco Champions meet regularly with a small committee.

Developing a Community Garden is a working project with 4 raised beds already in situ to grow produce and also a three compartment composting container.

In the quest to raise awareness of the need to become net zero and protect the planet in our Climate Emergency several opportunities have been harnessed to not only progress our aims but also build and extend connections with the local community such as Siston Parish Council, South Glos Council, Avon Wildlife Trust, Warmley Men In Sheds, Schools and Community Groups. We have also joined the Hazlenut Community Farm Network in partnership with St. Anne's Church, Syston. Caring for Creation is a standing item at PCC meetings and regular services and prayer are becoming embedded in worship and ethos.

Events of 2023 culminated in St Barnabas' Church promoting a Green Christmas. 17 Eco Christmas Tree Displays provided by local schools and groups were on view during Advent and there was also a Celebration Day with Eco products on sale, entertainment provided by local talent and refreshments all day. This event helped to increase church attendance at all services during Advent and Christmas.



In November 2024 we planted 1000 Spring Flowering bulbs supplied via a local Council project to provide pollinators for bees and other insects. This event was supported by Warmley Park College and Avon Wildlife Trust and was also a chance for the local community to come together.



## CONGREGATION

Our average Sunday morning attendance is approximately 29 people, 2 of whom are under 16 years. The monthly Sunday afternoon service is attended by an average of 6 while Wednesday morning average 10. At Rise and Shine, average attendance is 4 children and 13 adults. Numbers are still recovering from the Covid pandemic.

## MUSIC

Music provision at all our services is pre-recorded except for the 4th Sunday Communion Service which is organist led.

There are occasional concerts of classical and popular music very much appreciated by our local community.

The church bells are rung on a regular basis, the bell ringers practice each Wednesday evening and the bells are often rung at weddings and at church festivals.

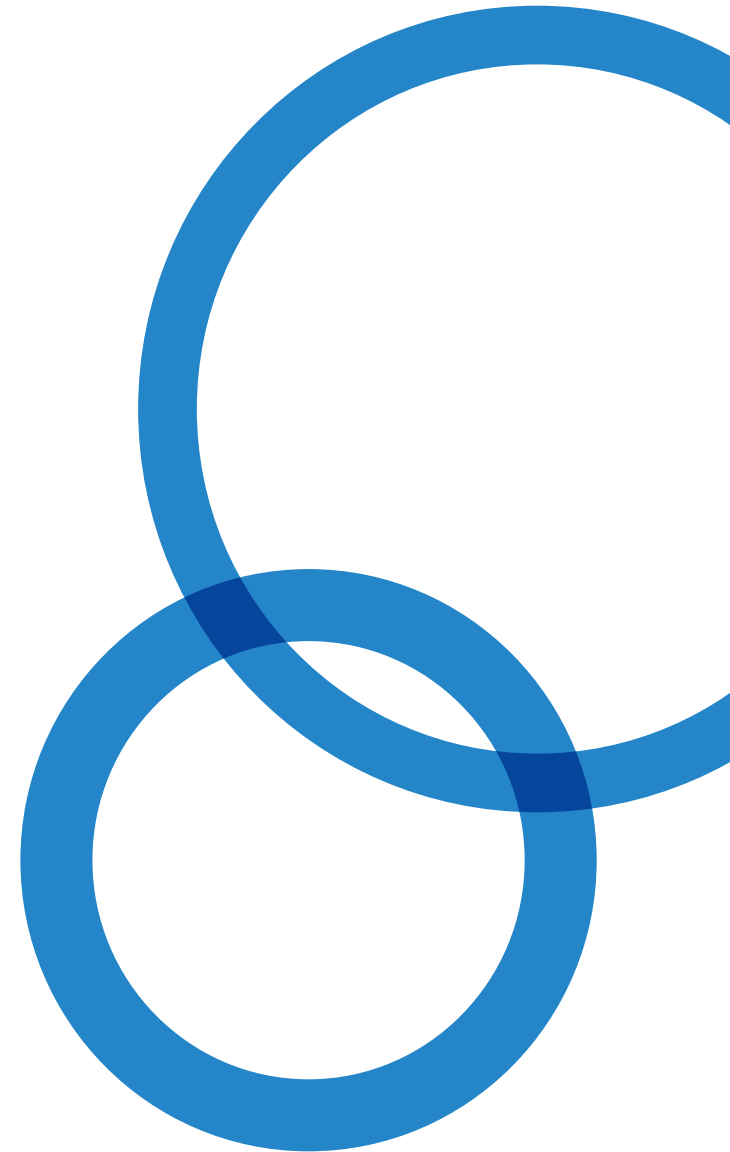


The Cameo Orchestra, Oldland Brass and Fingers and Frets also use the church or hall for rehearsals and sometimes perform at services and/or social events.



## COMMUNICATION

Our monthly magazine, shared with Syston is produced in house and is circulated by email. There is also a small supply of hard copies available for those who prefer a printed format. There is also a weekly Pew News and we use the local press and radio to advertise events and services.





The church was built in 1849. The building is an excellent example of Victorian church architecture. There are several beautiful stained glass windows and a full history of the church is available. St. Barnabas has an enviable reputation for the warm, friendly welcome everyone is offered at our services.

The church is situated at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in the heart of the community. Chairs provide flexibility for different service formats and other activities that take place in Church.

[The Jubilee Church Hall](#), situated next to the church grounds is used daily for a variety of activities.



## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The worshipping community has been affected significantly by ageing and the effects of the pandemic.
- Existing contacts with the community need to be enhanced and developed further.
- Although Rise and Shine offers an opportunity for family worship, work with families and schools could be improved.



# ST. ANNES, SYSTON

Syston lies north of Warmley.

St Anne's Syston is a grade 1 listed building, about 1000 years old.

The building tells the story of its community over the years with the marks of the bullets of Cromwell's soldiers alongside Jacobean family pews and the more recent millennium tapestry. These stories and many more continue today as our ancient bells are still rung by our current team.





## ST ANNES GRAVEYARD

The graveyard is currently open for burials and memorial stones for ashes. There is a natural habitat for a variety of smaller animals, birds and insects but also is visited at times by three or four deer. In Spring time there is an abundance of primroses.

## DEMOGRAPHY OF THE PARISH

The parish is split into two distinct areas. The first area, the traditional village which tends generally to have older residents. There are approximately three dozen inhabitants in this spot, all homeowners, and some distinct properties. The area local to the Church is in a quiet country lane, making it an ideal place for retreats and quiet days. In Gibbs Lane is the site for the Syston archaeological dig. Currently in its 4th year the dig has featured in the television programme “Digging for Britain”. This small hamlet is surrounded by agricultural land though there are few farms now and certainly no dairy farms.

Further up the lane there is also Syston Court, now split into apartments, with maybe approximately another twenty residents.

The housing developments, now about 20-25 years old, along the A4174 ring road have a population of a distinctly younger nature. This area is some distance from the church which maybe part of the reason St Annes does not attract people from this area. Alternately, of course, it could be that our model of praise is not of a preferred form. This would bear looking into with a “new eye”.





## MISSION STATEMENT

St. Anne's Syston aims to be a welcoming community which offers traditional worship to God, encourages children and young people, reaches out to all parishioners and develops links with the world-wide church.

We would be open to review of the Mission Statement with a view to encouraging new members.

## St. ANNE 'S CHURCH ROOM

This is a light, airy, and well equipped building. It was constructed in 1970 and has been extended and modernised. The Room is in a good state of repair. The Room is used by a variety of groups including artists, musicians and smaller scale hobby and craft meetings. We also offer the idea of vintage tea parties alongside one of the history lectures for senior birthday parties. There is a reasonable sized car park for the use of the Church and Church Room.

We have no post office, pubs, schools or shops but count ourselves lucky to have our two church buildings to hold both Church and neighbourhood events. There is a childrens nursery based at Syston Court. An attempt to collaborate

with them had to aborted in 2023 as the neighbourhood did not approve and the planners became involved.





## COMMUNITY DISCIPLESHIP AND LINKS

Organisations using the Church Room are encouraged to make use of the Church. Lively events such as the annual fete, Epiphany party, Harvest supper and skittles evenings ceased during Covid and have not restarted. The local community have helped to run a new strain of fund raising which makes very good use of our past in The Christmas Lectures, combined with afternoon teas. The two years that these have occurred have seen around 55 visitors to St Annes on Saturday afternoons.

At present South Glos Council are undertaking a consultation period about building over 4,000 new homes, some of which will be in the Syston area. It is thought this will be in the years 2025-2040.

St Annes history is our USP through the Church, Syston Court and the local dig. However we are not all about the past and now look forward to this new and exciting opportunity to grow our congregation and to find new users for the Church Room. We hope to be entering a time of growth where talents are encouraged to emerge.

There needs to be prayerful discussion going forward to formulate a plan of

uses for the Church, Church Room, Graveyard and car park to ensure funding will continue. This could help us to make certain that St Annes is valued and used in the future in a slightly different format. We need to learn how to grow with an adaptive plan to ensure St Annes remains in Syston for another 1,000 years or more.

There was a tractor and Wellie Service at the beginning of the year in place of our usual Plough Sunday and we were pleased to have 13 adults and children in attendance.

We were pleased to host the Little Puddleducks Nursery for their end of term concert on 5th December. There were over 100 adults and small children present.

St Annes has registered an interest with the Diocese to host retreats and quiet days as happened before the pandemic.

St Barnabas and St Annes have joined forces to interview and appoint a new architect on the retirement of the previous person.



As part of Transforming Church Together the PCC have recently agreed to investigate safer access to the bells and ringing chamber of the tower. As part of this it is hoped to find room for a small kitchen in the choir vestry to provide refreshments for the retreats.

Also under the auspices of TCT many of the graves as possible in the old part of the graveyard are being listed by an associate from Bitton. When complete there will be copies of the spread sheets in the Church for visitors, hoping to trace family from their past. This will hopefully be linked to our new web site, when complete. And help many people outside of the church family and locality.

We undertook the electricity audit in the Summer and have recently begun the journey to apply for the grant to improve the heating.

There was a beautiful simplicity to Jesus mission that we are keen to imitate. From the Gospel accounts we hear that he always started with the announcement that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

To fulfil this calling we need to have the support and leadership to encourage and develop our approach and to oversee the

discipleship pathway.

In short, If you love challenges then we have many opportunities for you to consider!

For more Syston information and our picture gallery please see our new website: [stannesiston.co.uk](http://stannesiston.co.uk)

For Syston history and ongoing work in the Glebe Field please see The Syston Archaeological Group (SAG) website: [glebe.azurewebsites.net](http://glebe.azurewebsites.net)

### ACCOUNTS AND STATISTICS

The congregation is generally of a mature age except for special occasions. Very few of the Parish residents are regular attendees. Covid halved our overall attendance. Those who do make up the congregation are usually from other parishes, present because of familial links from the past. We do not have an in house organist, but there are a couple of ladies who visit and play for us regularly.

Electoral roll for St Annes is – 28, down over recent years, mainly through old age/ death.

### AVERAGE ATTENDANCES

Morning Communion	7
Evening Communion	5
Morning Prayer	7
Evening Prayer	14
United Benefice Services	16
Baptisms	34
Funerals	30





# ST. MARY'S, BITTON

## OUR MISSION

We are a Christian Church in the heart of a village, seeking to support and serve the local community in the surrounding area.

- We believe that we are all on a journey of faith, and all are welcome here, no matter at what stage the journey.
- We aim to be outward looking, to be involved in the local community and to support and serve in the community wherever we can.
- We are a group of ordinary people who seek to follow Jesus Christ; we meet together to worship God and to encourage and support each other to grow in faith.
- We understand that different people have different reasons for coming to church; we respect these differences and are committed to welcoming but not overwhelming, and being sensitive to people's needs.



## THE PARISH

### GEOGRAPHY

Bitton is a village in South Gloucestershire, midway between Bristol and Bath. Although close geographically to the two other parishes in the benefice, it is largely separate and other than by foot or across country, one can only travel between the two parts of the benefice by travelling through the parish of Oldland. This effectively means that Bitton operates as a distinct parish within the benefice community.

The ecclesiastical parish comprises the village of Bitton, part of Willsbridge and the hamlets of Swineford, Upton Cheyney and Beach, on the west side of Lansdown and in the green belt, between Bath and Bristol. The population is just over 1600 and there are 677 occupied households. 30% of the population is aged under 30 with only 15% aged over 70. Ethnicity is 97% white. 47% of the population identifies as Christian.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the working population commutes either to Bristol or Bath. A small amount of light industry remains together with some office accommodation and farmland as well as the Avon Valley Steam Railway

operating out of Bitton station.

Housing is predominantly owner occupied and the village is increasingly popular for families as it has its own primary school. New housing, built within the past 10 years, has brought 115 new homes and has swelled attendance at a monthly service – Family Café Church – focused on our younger parishioners and their parents.

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Of the three parishes within the benefice, Bitton is by far the largest in land area, but much is rural, with a contrasting commuter village at its centre. There is currently good leadership, but many of the key players are over retirement age and future planning and resourcing is only starting to be addressed. There is a firm strategy in place for the church's future and progress is being made, albeit gradually, as finances allow.

Much of the focus of the PCC is on maintaining the fabric of a large grade 1 listed building and ensuring that it has the funds to do this. But the main challenges for continued worship is viability and the need to grow both the congregation and the worshipping community.

We see these challenges as opportunities. There are significant opportunities for new leadership and outreach to the many new families who have recently arrived in the village. Growth can also come through those who are largely supportive of the church but are not regular attenders, yet are willing to play an active part. There is a substantial legacy of goodwill on which to build and further opportunities for the continued engagement for children and young people.





## PEOPLE

### THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

The worshipping community is reflected in the size of the electoral roll which is 68 and has held steady at around that level for some time. Most of the congregation is over the age of 50 and it is the retired who provide much of the day-to-day support to the church. There are a few families of much younger age.

There is a much wider community who would consider themselves to be parishioners, who will attend infrequently or very rarely but who nonetheless are involved with the church or its fundraising activities during the course of the year.



## VISION & DIRECTION

The vision is intended to produce a growing and stronger worshipping congregation, a secure central identity within and serving the community, (regardless of their engagement with worship), and a sustainable building for the future. This will be achieved mainly through the efforts of the current church leadership but also through investment and reordering – which is currently underway.

Our ambitions are clustered around 4 separate strands:

### • **Worship (Mission)**

Our ambition is to make St Mary's an inspiring place for Christian worship. We aim to attract new people and be open to change in a positive manner, expanding the number of people who hear the message of Jesus Christ more clearly. In particular, we want to develop new expressions of worship that are attractive to a wider community than at present.

### • **Community (Hospitality)**

We want the church to be open and welcoming to the whole community and increase the sense of belonging. More community events taking place in the

church improves its sustainability and can provide income for its maintenance. But this is also intended to break down barriers, making the church become part of people's lives so that they are in a position to be more receptive to Christ's teaching.

### • **Heritage**

This is an ancient place of worship and one that is already sought out by visitors every day. Our ambition is to provide an experience in which they can understand the rich history of the church building and its purpose. Our intention is to preserve its heritage but recognise the changes that have taken place to meet the needs of the community and changes in religious practice and belief.

### • **Future (Renewal)**

Supporting these three aims is our ambition to renew the church by reordering and investment to provide a more flexible space and one that meets the needs of today's community and congregation.





## WORSHIP (MISSION)

### SERVICES

The provision of church services and the witness of Christ in the community is at the core of our vision.

We provide a range of services to meet different tastes and sections of the community. This can mean that some people attend only on one Sunday during the month, but providing both traditional services and alternatives has proved a successful approach.

Only one weekday service is held during the month on the fourth Thursday. This is a Celtic Communion Service. It is followed by a Tea and Coffee Morning attended by those who have worshiped, but also by other villagers who come a little later for the event.

### ATTENDANCE

Attendance at the main Sunday service, in 2023, averaged at 30 for a normal Sunday. About 8 people attend the 8am Holy Communion and 10 people regularly attend the monthly midweek Celtic Communion service. (Figures for annual attendance have not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.)



## FAMILY CAFE CHURCH

Over the past ten years Family Café Church has proved a significant hit with families and the church has been hard pushed to accommodate all who wish to attend on some occasions. There is room for expansion still and we would like to consider additional fresh expressions for older children in the near future.

## MUSIC

A small group of church members lead singing.

We also benefit from the St Mary's Minstrels, a small music group consisting of a pianist, two flautists and a cellist (plus an occasional drummer) who provide music on most Sundays to suit the form of the service.

St Marys also has a large working organ which is used mainly on the first Sunday and for special services.

## HOUSE GROUPS AND PRAYER MEETINGS

Regular house groups are organised on a seasonal basis invariably taking a theme or part of the Bible for study and discussion. There are usually three such house groups running concurrently.

There are usually two monthly prayer meetings organised at a benefice level: one in person and the other on Zoom.





## THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

This is a parish where there is a sense of association with the church by a substantial proportion of Bitton residents.

- A volunteer group helps maintain the churchyard.
  - Community volunteers open and close the church daily through the summer.
  - We have an active and enthusiastic group of bell ringers.
  - There are a number of civil society groups who are keen to make more use of the church, particularly those who have grown beyond the capacity of our church hall.
  - We see large turnouts for special services where we have made a special effort at organisation, not just at Christmas and, Remembrance Sunday, which suggest there is a large group of people who we could engage and accommodate.
  - Family Café Church is expanding and is becoming difficult to accommodate without reordering. There is too a growing population of older children for whom we need to provide interest.
- We have an active church Scout Group (Scouts, Cub Scouts and Beavers).
  - Our music group is making contact with musicians, and we have an increasing number of afternoon and evening concerts in the church.
  - There is a thriving village magazine, Focal Point, which is widely distributed and sold in the village shop.
  - St Mary's also has its own website [www.stmarysbitton.org.uk](http://www.stmarysbitton.org.uk).
  - The Church Fête takes place in early September each year, and is a very popular local attraction, which aims to bring the community together whilst raising a considerable sum for church funds.
  - An Autumn Fayre is also held on the last Saturday in October.





- The Meadows, our local primary school is not a church school, but we maintain close links. There is a new head teacher who is keen to develop links with the church and the wider community and has welcomed contact and leadership from the church. Children and teachers from the school visit the church and use it for their carol service and more recently in the summer for a leavers' service.

The strength of community involvement and engagement provides confidence that our future plans and development objectives will be well received and supported.

### THE WIDER COMMUNITY

From its unrestricted income, the church donates 10% to five national and international charities. Additional donations of food (at harvest) and gifts (at Christmas) are given to local charities.

St Mary's also supports the work of a Church Mission Society worker.

During the past few years, the parish has established links with the Sisters of the Church who run a charity distributing food, toiletries etc, to the homeless in Bristol.

The congregation is invited to leave items for collection in the church porch and they are taken to the sisters each month.





## HERITAGE

There are clear Anglo-Saxon elements within the church building which at one time formed part of a collection of church buildings between the main road and the river. The church is much larger than might be expected in a relatively small village.

People have gathered here in worship for well over a millennium leaving not just a spiritual legacy, but physical items that tell the story. Among these are the remains of a large stone Saxon Rood, a decorated three seat Sedalia (1299), unusual ceiling bosses and floor, and individually carved oak pews.

Inside the church, the aisleless Saxon nave leads to a chancel which is particularly unusual. Its ceiling bosses telling the tale of St Mary of Egypt, while its tessellated floor, laid by the nineteenth century vicar, Canon Ellacombe, is copied from the church of S. Anastasia in Verona. The Ellacombes, father and son, who were vicars of the parish for 99 years between them, are responsible for much of the present order and decoration including the individually carved oak pews.

As part of our development strategy, we are seeking to promote and encourage visitors to the church in increasing numbers. The stories of the church objects and treasures can be accessed in the church using a smartphone and the openly available Wi-Fi. QR codes link the visitor to a set of audio descriptions explaining the objects and placing them in context.

It is expected that the church will soon feature on the website of Small Pilgrim Places and, in conjunction with Bitton Parish History Group we hope soon to be providing an additional service to people seeking their family history by linking to an extensive database of burials and gravestones within the churchyard.



## FUTURE (RENEWAL)

Securing the future of St Mary's has been the focus of much of the work of the PCC over the past few years. There is a recognition that the church can only survive if it is more financially secure and has a clear strategy to develop and grow both as a place of worship and as a community resource.

The PCC has been working towards a future strategy and reordering for some time. It has taken a cautious approach sought community support and undertaken informative visits to other churches in the area. The strategy and direction that emerged out of this as has a long-term plan not only to reorder but to develop the church building, renewing its facilities and enabling it to operate securely into the future as a place of Christian worship, a community resource and a heritage asset.

## PLANS

Our plans fall in two phases:

- In the first phase (which is currently underway) we are concentrating on the interior of the church. In this phase the number of pews will be reduced to ten rows (20 in all) and the pews themselves

will be made mobile so that they can be easily relocated when necessary. The walls will be conserved and cleaned which will in turn support the installation of more modern and more efficient lighting systems. The floor will also be replaced to improve accessibility, and possibly with the installation of underfloor heating or at least the opportunity to provide a more efficient system in the medium term. In addition, utilities and facilities will be upgraded to provide improved hospitality and upgrade utilities.

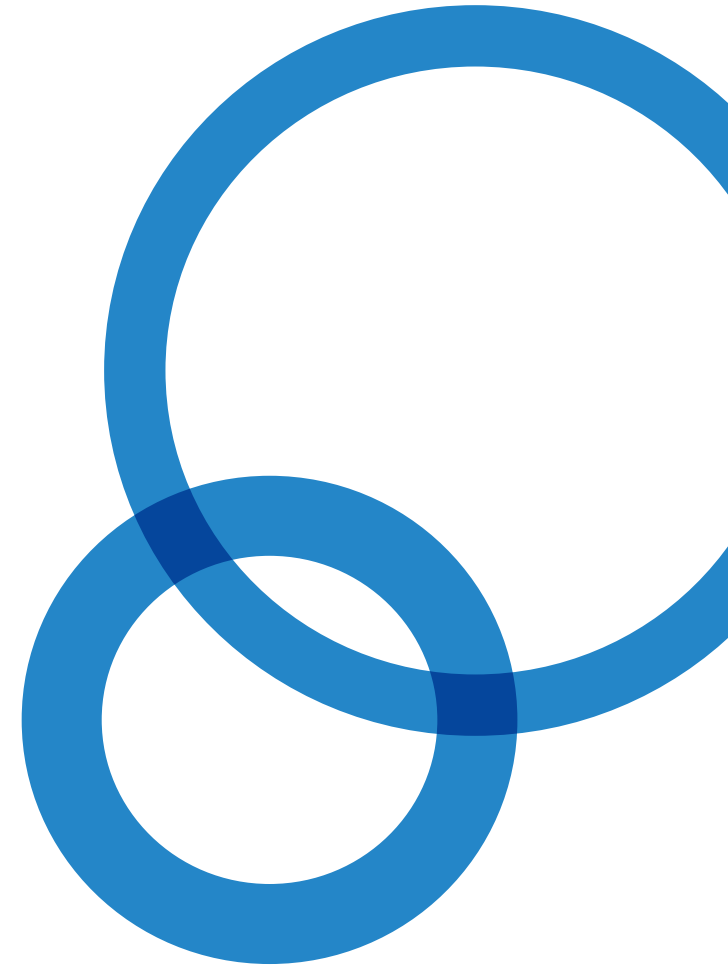
- The second phase will involve the construction of additional lavatories and storage as well as a small kitchen on the south side of the church.

## PROGRESS

A faculty has been granted for a major programme of work covering the first phase which is planned to be undertaken in stages as funding and feasibility studies permit.

During 2024, work will be undertaken on all the remaining pews to make them mobile and create a flexible space. Fundraising is also taking place for the cleaning and conserving of the interior walls to create a more welcoming atmosphere. We are also

assessing the possibility of installing solar panels to the roof, improving lighting, and exploring options for future heating methods.





## FACILITIES

### THE CHURCH

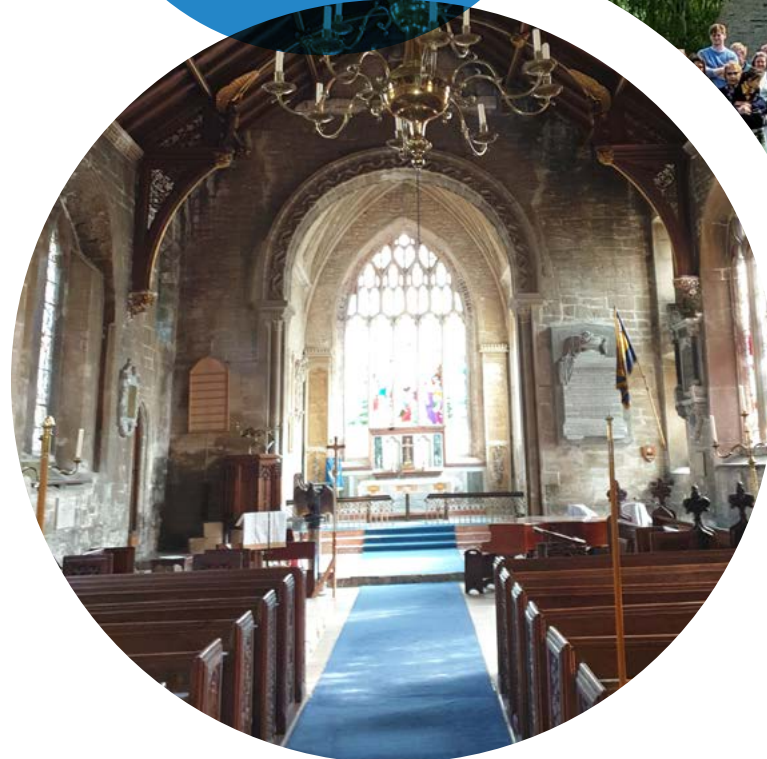
The church currently holds 200 people comfortably in pews with additional chairs that can be brought into use when needed. The chantry chapel can provide a comfortable service for 20 people.

At the rear of the nave is a small kitchen area used for coffee and light lunches and is used regularly after the morning service. Modern facilities include a lavatory (suitable for people with disabilities), central heating, and a projector screen (cunningly hidden from view until needed). The sound system is in good working order.

As a Grade 1 listed building, the church is in good repair.

The church is open every day during the summer, enabling visitors to walk in and look around. We lock away some valuable items after services but otherwise the place is available for visitors to view at their leisure. We recently began to record the footfall and have recorded up to 100 visitors in a week when the church is open.

The care of the large churchyard is supported by a separate fund under the PCC.





## THE CHURCH HALL

The church hall is the former schoolroom and located some 150 yards from the church. It has its own users' committee and operates under the authority of the PCC.

It has recently received some renovation funded by the National Lottery and is in reasonable order. It is used by a wide variety of local societies and clubs and is available for private hire.

One of the drawbacks both for the use of the church and the church hall is the lack of car parking but we have ambitions to make use of adjacent glebe land.

Amongst the local organisations that use the hall are the Beavers, a Playgroup, Table Tennis, the WI, the Gardening Club, a Yoga group and a village film society "Flicks in the Sticks" which shows popular films on a Friday evening.

## CHURCHYARD & GLEBE

The churchyard remains open for burials and the interment of ashes. There is limited space in the churchyard for burials and decisions to extend or close the churchyard are likely to be needed within the next 10 to 20 years.

The grass is mown once in each month

or more under contract. A significant donation has been made in the past year which should assure future maintenance and provide some investment to reduce costs and make some improvements.

Adjacent to the churchyard is a large open field (approx. 2 acres) owned by the diocese but let to a local farmer for grazing purposes. The church has some access rights under the terms of the lease and the field provides the location for the annual church fête. St Mary's has no off-street parking and the roads around the church are narrow lanes. The PCC is keen to use the field for parking and believes this could be undertaken in a way that is least intrusive to the local area.





# BENEFICE FINANCES AND DATA

	Warmley		Syston		Bitton	
Year	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Income	67,547	40,420	12,009	20,790	78,551	71,921
Expenditure	59,157	40,659	13,705	30,476	85,426	67,211
Parish Share	11,450	11,920	6,000	5,280	40,090	41,090

The usual monthly pattern of Sunday worship across the benefice is shown in the table below

	BITTON	WARMLEY	SYSTON
<b>Week 1</b>	10:30 Parish Communion	9:30 Rise and Shine 16:00 Healing & Wholeness service	No Service
<b>Week 2</b>	10:30 Family Service	10:30 Holy Communion	10:30 Holy Communion
<b>Week 3</b>	10:30 Morning Worship	10:30 Prayer & Praise	18:30 Holy Communion
<b>Week 4</b>	8:00 Holy Communion 9:30 Family Café Church	10:30 Parish Communion	10:30 Morning Prayer (BCP)
<b>Week 5</b>	10:30 Benefice Holy Communion		

In addition, there is a weekly Wednesday morning Holy Communion at Warmley and a monthly Thursday morning Celtic Communion at Bitton.

## OCCASIONAL OFFICES 2023

Church	Weddings	Blessings	Baptisms	Funerals
St Annes	0	0	2	2
St Barnabas	2	0	8	5
St Marys	1	0	4	7

# PERSON SPECIFICATION

## QUALIFICATIONS / TRAINING

### Essential

- An Ordained priest within the Church of England, or a Church in communion with it, or a Church whose orders it recognises.
- Satisfactorily completed Initial Ministerial Education.
- Fully trained in and committed to safeguarding the whole community and able to lead in nurturing a safeguarding culture and the implementation of safeguarding policy and practice.
- Proactive in engaging in further training that enhances this role.

### Desirable

- Other training that enhances the skills of community and / or missional leadership

## EXPERIENCE

### Essential

- Collaborative team leadership which discerns vision and sensitively implements change at benefice and parish level.
- Enabling and encouraging mission and ministry by supportive development of volunteers and delegation to them.

- Leading and developing worship through a variety of traditional, contemporary, and all-age ways with creativity and innovation.
- Visible engagement outside the church, building relationships with schools and with other community organisations.
- Enabling collaboration within the benefice and with ecumenical partners.

### Desirable

- Experience of mission in areas of new housing.

## KNOWLEDGE/ SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

### Essential

- A skilled teacher and preacher who sensitively challenges their hearers to make links between scripture, faith, and the world today.
- The ability to discern and respond to opportunities for mission in the diversity of this benefice context.
- The skills to work with the parishes to seek practical, workable applications of 'Transforming Church. Together'.
- A generous pastoral leader, whose care extends to the welcome of newcomers.
- The ability to deepen discipleship so that all show God's love in action.



- The ability to progress the church in moving to carbon net zero in line with the diocesan target, and to deepen the benefice engagement with Eco-Church.

#### **Desirable**

- The ability to foster spiritual development through music, art, drama, sport and other cultural pursuits.

### GENERAL ATTRIBUTES

#### **Essential**

- A priest with a lively and contagious faith in Jesus who inspires other to grow in their faith.
- A warm and approachable person who naturally builds trust and connection with others.
- Committed to a full engagement with Deanery and Diocese, not least within the opportunities afforded by 'Transforming Church. Together'.

### OTHER

#### **Essential**

- Faithfully prayerful, grounded in scripture, and earnestly desiring the Holy Spirit.
- Someone who cares for the whole of themselves by ensuring they take time off for recreation, that they develop good supportive relationships, and that they pay proper attention to family life and health.



# CONTACT

Thank you for reading this profile. If you would like to know more about this vacancy please email the Archdeacon of Malmesbury, Christopher Bryan, [christopher.bryan@bristoldiocese.org](mailto:christopher.bryan@bristoldiocese.org), to arrange a conversation.

