

PARISH PROFILE

CHRIST CHURCH and ST JOHN, CLAPHAM



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March 2025

PART ONE



WELCOME

CHRIST CHURCH AND ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST, CLAPHAM

Welcome to the parish of Christ Church and St John the Evangelist, Clapham. Thank you for showing an interest in the vacancy for the post of Vicar of our parish.

We hope the following story of our parish will interest you and help you in discerning whether God is calling you to serve in this place.



INTRODUCTION

A WATERSHED MOMENT

Christ Church, situated in the Larkhall Ward in Clapham, is a diverse, inclusive, community-based church rooted in the Catholic tradition of the Church of England. We serve an inner-city parish. Each and every Sunday we end our worship with the words 'The mass is ended our mission begins', which expresses how we see our role in the community.

We're now at a very important moment in our history. A watershed moment. After 28 years of service, our Vicar retired in June 2024. And we now look towards recruiting a new priest to drive and nurture this next phase of our growth.

Our congregation has remained loyal and stable throughout this interregnum. However, overall, numbers remain relatively low, at around 40-50 on a Sunday, compared with pre-COVID Sunday attendance of around 60-80. The congregation consists of families with children, single people and a group of loyal elders who continue to contribute to the life of the church through service and prayer. At present we are struggling to attract new members. COVID hit all members of society and has had an effect on all of us, and not just in numbers. The loss of our previous incumbent has deeply affected us. There's a real need and desire for renewal.

Whilst we have reserves of just over £200,000, in recent years our annual expenditure has exceeded income by significant amounts. This isn't sustainable!

We now need a new Vicar who can help us address the following key issues:

- We need to recognise the changes in the community we serve to ensure that the programmes we're offering (spiritually, educationally and socially) really meet their needs;
- We need to grow our congregation, especially amongst younger families and young people;;
- We need to maximise our resources to ensure we transform ourselves into a financially sustainable church.

Progress in each of these areas will help to build firm foundations for the next phase of Christ Church's future. These challenges cannot be ignored if we are to continue to serve our community and develop as the People of God in this area.

WHO ARE WE?

WHO ARE WE?

We are a church rooted in the local community.

Our socio/economic grouping is best described as C2DE.

We are a diverse congregation - the majority of worshippers are female and of African and Caribbean heritage.

We are a community church initiating and supporting projects which respond to the needs of the neighbourhood.

OUR VALUES AND BELIEFS

Our key values are inclusion and acceptance of the uniqueness of each person who comes through our doors.

We affirm the urgent need to make the Kingdom of God known in our congregation and in our community, showing God's love, justice and mercy in all we do, as we follow Jesus Christ in loving service of our neighbours.



OUR VISION AND OUR STRENGTHS

OUR VISION

Our Mission Action Plan affirms that our church life needs to build on a clear sense of God's vision for the world and on what God is calling us to be and to do.

We see ourselves as a community church. This is at the heart of our mission. We have strong and well-established links with the local community. Our buildings are relatively close together, situated on the edge of the Larkhall and the Springfield Estates.

This vision of the church asks us to really know, understand and connect with the community we serve.

We seek to grow as a church, increase our congregation numerically, nourish our spirituality (in sacrament, Word, knowledge, and service), and assure our sustainability through prudent and realistic financial accountability and innovative fund raising.



OUR STRENGTHS

We are a rich diversity of people from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and with a range of talents, skills and competencies.

We are warm and welcoming - known for our hospitality and for providing food.

We are open, inclusive and accepting of all people and value everyone regardless of age or ability, culture and ethnicity, sexual orientation, class or economic status.

We have some hidden resources which could be developed further. These include a number of buildings and spaces which are available for rent to host events.

We have good musical interest - with a committed organist and a desire that our music and worship should express our cultural diversity. With the right support, our adult singing group could be resurrected.

We have a committed and active PCC and a faithful core of people who recognise the need for growth and change.

We have an excellent administrator working three days a week in the parish office next to the vicarage.



THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

THE CHALLENGES

The size of the congregation has not recovered to its pre-Covid level, partly due to a number of bereavements, people leaving the parish and a lack of new members.

Significantly fewer young families and children attend church, now. There is an urgent need to develop what we offer to young children and young people to make the church attractive to them.

Although we have a (dwindling) reserve of just over £200,000, we are not a sustainable church. We spend more than we earn. Congregational giving is low, and our rental income is insecure. Our life and mission depend on making good use of our resources and living within our means.

We need to develop leadership skills, encourage training for lay ministry; enable members of the congregation to reach their full potential as leaders to ensure those in need are nourished, and share the load effectively amongst those who have a desire to serve.

The role of St John's church needs very careful consideration. It has huge potential. It can generate income, through the renting of space. But it could also become a huge drain on our very limited resources.



WHAT WE NEED IN A PRIEST

WE ARE WE LOOKING FOR:

- a full-time inspirational, energetic leader, living in the vicarage in the heart of the community, who will help nurture our growth as a church and is committed to our vision;
- an experienced priest with the ability to lead a diverse parish in a demanding locality. Someone who recognises what it means to be a community church and who will build on existing links in the local community and foster new ones;
- a priest who affirms the centrality of the Eucharist, is willing to shape and re-shape worship where necessary, affirming the existing traditions, where appropriate, and reflecting the inclusive values of Christ Church;
- a warm leader with spiritual and prayerful presence, one who is able to open hearts and minds to a contemporary understanding of scripture and its meaning for our community, today;
- a confident person who is able to lead from the front while encouraging collaborative ministry; and, who will encourage and support lay participation in the life of the church and build on the experience which exists; and,
- a business-minded person who is able to review our financial and fundraising strategies and with the PCC draw up a business plan to help ensure that the parish is on a secure and sustainable financial footing.
- a priest with experience in supporting those who work with children and young people - in the church and community;
- a person who will work with our administrator to develop our existing online presence and to enable clear communication and efficient ways to communicate across different groups - and with the wider public; and,
- a person with some musical interest and experience to enhance our worship, resurrect our singing group and perhaps begin a children's choir;

PART TWO

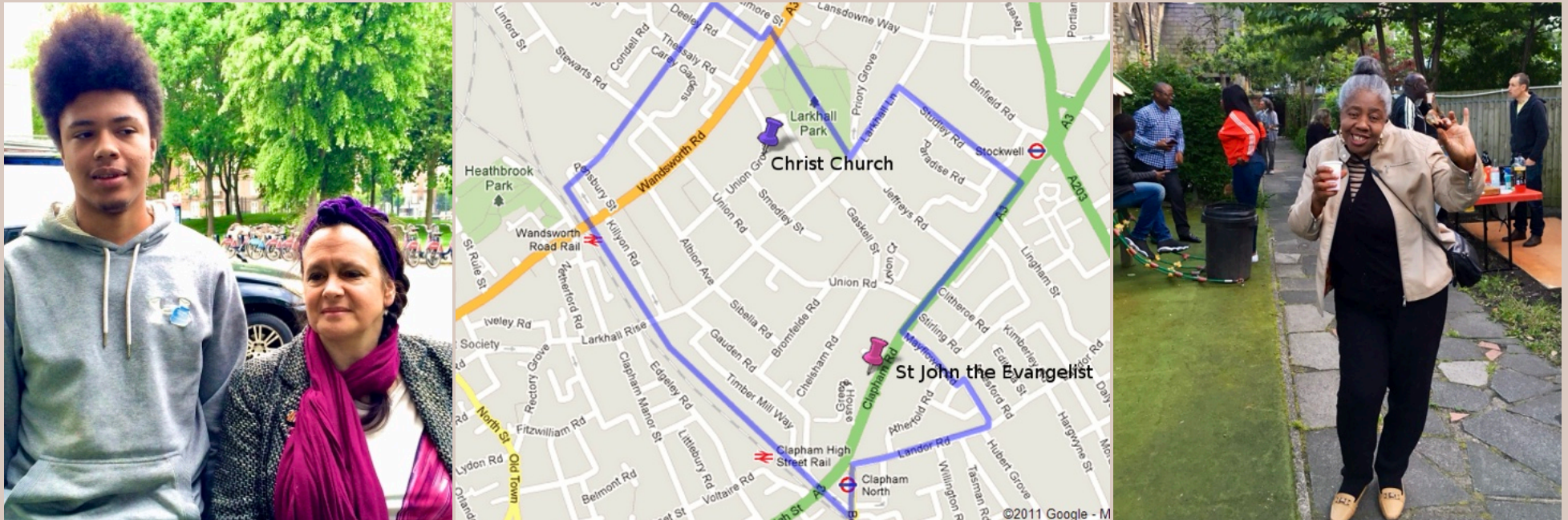


BACKGROUND TO THE PARISH

THE LOCALITY - WHERE WE ARE

The Parish of Christ Church and St John is situated in the London Borough of Lambeth. We serve an inner-city neighbourhood. The area has undergone significant changes. Whilst there remains a high proportion of social housing, there is an increasing number of expensive flats being constructed which are privately owned.

Transport links are excellent as is the proximity to London and the City. Many people work outside of the borough. Christ Church itself is close to Larkhall Park where there are sports facilities and playgrounds for children.



FORMATION OF THE PARISH

The parish of Christ Church, Clapham was proposed in 1849 to serve a deprived district around Wandsworth Road. A temporary church (now the parish hall) was built in 1849. The present church was consecrated in 1862.

The parish of St John the Evangelist, built in 1842, was established earlier than Christ Church. The former was originally a district at the north-eastern end of Clapham, serving a largely middle-class residential area around the Clapham Road.

The two parishes were merged in late 2001 to become Christ Church and St John, Clapham, centred at Christ Church.

THE POPULATION

The Parish of Christ Church and St John probably houses 10,000 to 11,000 people. Its population is typical of inner-city London: just under half are immigrants and just over half are people of colour

There is no up-to-date estimate of the population of the parish. The Diocese of Southwark website has a parish estimate based on the 2011 census (10,800). The closest 2021 census figures are for the electoral ward surrounding Christ Church, which lies further to the north and has a larger population but a very similar mix of people.

With few significant changes in the housing stock since 2011, the Parish population has probably not changed much from 10,800. Figures show that the mixes of age, ethnicity and country-of-origin also changed little between 2011 and 2021:

- The population is quite young: 18% below 17, nearly 75% 18 to 64 and 7.3% 65 or over;
- Roughly half the population is white (this proportion is decreasing); one third (increasing) are black or black British; the rest are mixed race, “other” or Asian British;

- Just over half of the population is British born; the next biggest groups are from Europe (17.4%) and Africa (11.7%); and 16.1% are from elsewhere in the world,

In 2021 52.4% of the population described themselves as Christian; 33.3% as having no religion; 11.7% as Muslim and 2.6% as “other”.

SOCIAL PRESSURES

Across the country people are experiencing financial hardship, and in our area there is much economic and social deprivation. This is seen by the numbers of residents using our food bank. Social isolation and loneliness are increasing especially amongst the elderly and single parents. The voluntary sector which has played an important role in addressing these issues now struggles to secure funding and so provide services. Many families are ‘just managing’ and others are struggling to meet the basic costs of everyday living.



CHURCH BUILDINGS WITHIN THE PARISH

TWO CHURCHES

There are two church buildings in the parish: Christ Church and St John the Evangelist. Christ Church is the worshipping centre of the parish. There are two other buildings in close proximity to Christ Church and these three buildings, which are situated on the edge of the Springfield Housing Estate form a hub around which the community gravitates.

CHRIST CHURCH

Christ Church was consecrated in 1862. It is a Grade 2 listed building. The architect was Benjamin Ferrey.

Christ Church was originally highly decorated but after war damage much of the interior was whitewashed and stonework and tiling were removed. In 2015 extensive renovation took place. A few pews were removed, and an open space was created which is used by the congregation to gather together and offer hospitality to newcomers.

Most church services are conducted at Christ Church. The centre of life in the parish is the Sunday Eucharist.

CHRIST CHURCH VICARAGE

The Vicarage is next door to the church: a large house with five bedrooms on the first floor, kitchen, dining room , living room and study on the ground floor. A small walled garden is attached to the house.

A large study was added in 1886 with a separate entrance next to the church. This is used as the Parish Office and for Parish meetings and events. Recently the adjacent garden area has been fitted with decking and cover for social events.

The top floor of the Vicarage has been converted to a self-contained flat with its own external access. It is now rented out by the diocese. The rest of the building contains a study, drawing room, kitchen and dining room on the ground floor, and on the second floor five bedrooms, bathroom and wet room.



It was built in 1865 and is an important early example of an Arts and Crafts House. Like the church it is also Grade 2 listed.

PARISH HALL

The parish hall was built in 1849 as a temporary church pending the construction of Christ Church close by. It is part owned by the diocese of Southwark. For many years the church hall housed a children's nursery; now it is used by many of the projects which are described elsewhere in this profile.

CHRIST CHURCH GARDEN

The church has a small garden in front of the church tended by members of the congregation. By the side of the church is another garden area with some decking which is used for social events.

CHRIST CHURCH CAR PARK

Next to the church, the car park is used by the staff of Union Grove nursery and other volunteers such as homework club teachers. This is a real asset, in an area where parking spaces are at a premium.

ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST

St John's Church, a Grade 2 listed building, occupies a confined site on the west side of Clapham Road. It was built as a chapel-of-ease for Holy Trinity Church in 1842. In 2008, Sunday services ceased to be held at St John's when Christ Church became the centre of worship in the parish. A weekly Eucharist is celebrated in the Lady Chapel.

The building is presently used to house local community groups. On Sundays it provides a home for a Brazilian Pentecostal Church and two other independent churches. There is an extensive crypt which extends under the whole building. The large, fenced garden behind the church, now sadly overgrown, has been used in the past for social gatherings.

In 2015 extensive plans were made for St John's which included enhancing the worship centre, creating a community building and improving access to the garden. Plans were drawn up which included affordable accommodation in the form of flats added to the upper part of the building. Unfortunately, these plans were rejected by Lambeth Planning department. In spite of the difficulties of the previous attempt, St John's remains a very attractive site with huge potential. With its large open space and garden, it could become an asset for the community. Work carried out by Habitat for Humanity uncovered the need amongst inhabitants for safe spaces where they can gather.

Funds from the sale of the church hall have been set aside for the repair and maintenance of St Johns. The funds are administered by a separate charity of which the Vicar and church wardens are trustees.

ABOUT CHRIST CHURCH

A EUCHARISTIC HEART

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the 'beating heart' of Christ Church and is central to parish life – vestments are worn, and a team of servers (young and old) help with the burning of incense and the ringing of bells. It is the place where we unite and where we bring our differences to the table for the Eucharistic Prayer and to receive communion. During the service all those present join the offertory procession to the altar where we stand in a circle around table for communion (a practice we adopted from our trips to Iona).

Morning Prayer is said each day (online at present). Until recently there have been two or three eucharists each week.



MUSIC STYLE

At present we sing traditional hymns but we have been very reliant on our vicar to drive and enliven us, and an outstanding organist to play for us. We are seeking ways of incorporating different styles of music and hymns to reflect the diverse cultures within our congregation. One example of this is a group of drummers, led by our African members, which enhances our worship on particular occasions. This is a work in progress and certainly needs more focus.

Christ Church is blessed with a fine organ built by T.C. Lewis (the organ builder for Southwark Cathedral). Following water damage in the 1980's, the organ was restored, but there were only sufficient funds to restore two of the three manuals.

There is no longer a church choir, since we currently don't have someone to lead it. But members of the group sometimes participate in services. A professional quartet of singers is enlisted for the Good Friday and Easter Saturday services. Singers from Wimbledon Chamber Choir usually sing at Christ the King, our Patronal Festival.



AN EASTER FOCUSSED CHURCH

We are an Easter focussed church. Holy Week and Easter are deliberately the high point of our worship life, as the focus and intensity increases throughout Lent until the Easter celebration. On Palm Sunday a procession with palms and singing takes place through the estates – led by a donkey. Other festivals and saint's days are recognised but to a lesser extent. Christ the King, our annual festival of name, is another high point and is usually well attended and supported.

Lay people take an active part in the worship. We have a visiting Lay Reader; eucharistic ministers; a lay preacher, who is authorised by the Bishop to preach on Sundays; a dedicated Sacristan; a team of servers; a small group who read the scripture lessons; and lay leaders of the prayers of intercession.

Once a month, on a Sunday evening, a quiet reflective prayer service takes place with simple songs, short bible readings and times of silence. This is inspired by the style of worship which takes place in Taize and is attended by a small group. During the vacancy an informal prayer group has begun to meet monthly, on a Saturday morning, to pray for the future of the church.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

There is a very committed group of 10 trained Sunday School teachers who lead an average of 8 children, weekly. This takes place during the service, between the Gloria and the Eucharist. Currently it serves all ages of children, but the majority of children are of primary age.

Roots learning resources are used which focus around the Gospel reading. These have excellent suggestions for interactive and creative responses from the children, who really enjoy attending and have lots of ideas!

The children's work is displayed at the back of the church, and they occasionally share what they've learned in front of Church. The Sunday School team are eager to learn and attend training sessions, something we would like to do more of. We would like to recruit more teachers who can cater to the needs of the little children and the young people of secondary school age. This is something that has happened very successfully in the past when young people met in the Vicarage Room weekly as well as having outings and pizza nights. Currently we are missing this age range in Church, and it would be good to have some training and support for teachers to create a plan to attract older children and to keep them engaged.

PARISH LIFE

SUNDAY

The 11am Sunday service is the major moment in the life of the parish. The worship, both word and sacrament, unite us and afterwards we continue our fellowship over refreshments. This is an occasion where we welcome visitors and newcomers.

BAPTISM AND FIRST COMMUNION

Baptisms are held during the Sunday Eucharist or at the Holy Saturday Vigil. They are an occasion of joy for the whole congregation. Also, during the Easter Vigil, children aged 7 years and older may receive their first communion, for which they, with their parents, will have been prepared for during the weeks of Lent.

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

We have a Social Committee who help organise the parish meals, which take place periodically during the church year. Christ Church has a reputation for being a welcoming and hospitable community and sharing food together is a sign of this.

The committee also organise other events, like the annual parish outing during the summer. This outing gives the opportunity of a day out of London for those adults and children who might otherwise not be able to do this. Another social occasion occurs to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. An outdoor Eucharist is followed by a BBQ. This is not only for regular church members; members of the local community who participate in our various community projects also attend.

THE PCC

The PCC meets monthly after Sunday worship. There is also a PCC away day each year where matters of concern can be discussed and we seek to understand God's invitation to us at this moment in time. This is held in a religious community which is easily accessible.

THE CHRIST CHURCH CONGREGATION

The congregation comes from many different countries and cultures. For many, English is not their mother tongue.

Our electoral roll numbers are currently 109 of whom 62 are resident in the parish. Although a detailed breakdown is not available at least 21 different nationalities are represented.

An aspect which is more difficult to define and to put into words is the sense of community and caring which exists between members of Christ Church. With just over half of worshippers living in the parish, this allows informal contact throughout the week, creating a strong sense of belonging within the church community. This is a gift, which we seek to offer to newcomers, extending this sense of belonging to all who come, helping them to find their place at Christ Church.



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Looking at the history of Christ Church we see there is a longstanding involvement in the local community. When asked what we want for the future, one member of the congregation replied, 'we want to actively continue working in the area - in fact we want to grow what already exists and have even more impact on the community.'

Springfield Community Flat (SCF)

The Springfield Community Flat was conceived in 1999-2000 through a co-operation between those living on the Springfield Estate and church members. Its formation coincided with discussions which were taking place at meetings of Christ Church PCC around the possibilities of a wider engagement in the local neighbourhood.

The work of the SCF slowly evolved into a vibrant and busy Community hub. It grew into a charity with a member of the clergy acting as CEO. It also became a major Voluntary Sector Community Project recognised by Lambeth Council and gaining the support of local councillors and the MP for the area. Services offered included Breakfast and After School clubs, a young parents' group, children/youth groups at Stewart Road Adventure Playground, one-to-one legal advice sessions, a Senior Citizens group and lunch club, a food bank, Back to Work training and ESOL classes.

SCF has evolved and has survived the death of the CEO, the pandemic and a drastic withdrawal of funding. Now the charity employs one support worker and two part-time workers at the Adventure playground. The incumbent has been the Chair of the charity. The support worker is based in the church hall. One of their responsibilities is to secure funding for the different projects and to co-ordinate the continuing activities of the charity. Several members of Christ Church are involved in the work of SCF.

The following activities are offshoots and developments of the initial initiative.

Thursday After School Club

Our After School Club runs every Thursday of term time 3.30–6pm in the Parish Hall. This outreach work was established to address the disadvantages that local children were facing following the school closures during the COVID lockdowns.

The club seeks to support the children educationally as evidence continues to show attainment gaps amongst disadvantaged communities exacerbated by the lockdown. Crucially, it serves to support the mental health of children affected by long periods isolated from their friends and peers. Over half the children attend with their siblings, and whilst some attend Christ Church, other children are practicing Muslim. Although not overtly a religious setting it creates an excellent environment for early inter faith dialogue!

We have a cook from the community who prepares a hot meal, and eating together forms a central part of our time together, encouraging good social and communication skills. After the meal children are involved in drama and art and in the summer gardening. Most of the children have attended for over 2 years. Such good quality children's work happening at the heart of our multi-faith community is something we are proud of.

Stewarts Road Adventure Playground and Youth Centre

This arose out of a need for a space for young people living on the estate. Activities which take place throughout the year include play schemes and preschool and after school activities. Two paid part time workers and a group of volunteers oversee the events held in Stewarts Road. The previous incumbent was in close contact with them.

Senior Citizens Group

The Senior Citizens' Group is attended by local people and has been running for years in the church hall every Wednesday. A hot meal is prepared by a local volunteer, a member of Christ Church. The benefits of simply attending this group are mental stimulation and social interaction, which are crucial to emotional wellbeing. Those attending are a group who are the most likely to experience feelings of loneliness and depression. The weekly group helps to lower stress and improve mood as they meet new people and remain socially active.

Although not regular church attenders, the members of the group consider themselves apart of Christ Church community. Christ Church is their church

The Wednesday Food Bank

Since lockdown it has been held in or outside the church building. It continues to provide essential food to those in need. Between 30 - 50 bags are given out weekly to people from the local community. Surplus food is provided from supermarkets and farms.

ESOL classes are held in the church hall and are attended by those living in the area including Ukrainian refugees. A grant has been received to cover the cost of teacher's salaries. A Ukrainian couple have become regular members of the church as a result of attending these classes.

The work of SCF and its continuing work in the above-mentioned projects are a significant and major part of the ministry of Christ Church. Many people in the congregation both past and present have benefited from its intergenerational services. They are all lay led. It is imperative that these valued provisions for people living in the parish continue to be at the centre of our social outreach and prayer.

The Union Grove Community Nursery



The nursery operates as a separate organisation within the parish. A small-scale community-led day nursery, it quickly outgrew the allocated space provided by Christ Church. Funding was found through the efforts of the clergy to increase the space in order to accommodate childcare needs for more families.

The nursery is in the parish. It is a registered charity, with an emphasis on partnership with parents and carers. Many of our congregation and their children have attended the nursery or used the service. There are close links with Christ Church through the staff and the children who attend. Until recently the Vicar has been part of the management committee.

St Johns Community development Project

St John's Community Development Project is a registered charity which is based in St Johns Church building. It holds various activities including Exercise Class on Tuesday, creative activity on Thursday, digital literacy and a social club. Some of those who attend are church members and others local residents from the neighbouring council estate.

Church Hall

As well as providing a home to most of the above-mentioned projects, the Church Hall is used by many local groups such as Food Surplus – a charity which collects surplus food and provides a free lunch to anyone in the neighbourhood. About 40 people regularly attend.

It is also used by the local Mosque for evening prayer meetings each day of the week as well as their youth group which meets on Saturdays.

An exercise group (Zumba) and Alcoholics Anonymous use the premises for a reduced rent. The Parish takes part in the Robes project each year, offering a place to sleep and meals for one day a week over a period of six weeks.





LINKS WITH OTHER CHURCHES

THE NORTH LAMBETH DEANERY

The Parish is a member of the North Lambeth Deanery. We have three members of the Deanery Synod who are elected for three years at the Parish Annual Meeting. Deanery meetings are held three or four times a year and churches take turns in hosting. Meetings have been held both at Christ Church and at St John.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN CLAPHAM

Churches Together in Clapham (CTiC) seeks to play its part in the ecumenical calling expressed by Churches Together in England 'Many Churches, One Purpose.' CTiC includes six Anglican churches, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, The Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox church and the Power of Living Word Ministries.

Each church has up to three representatives helping run CTiC. Regular meetings for clergy and for lay people take place. In the past study groups have been held during Lent. CTiC has its own web site.

FINANCIAL STATUS

SOLVENT BUT UNSUSTAINABLE

The Parish has financial reserves of £214,000 (December 2023), deriving from the sale of the Vicarage at St. John's in the 1980's. However, in recent years annual expenditure has exceeded income by significant amounts. If we continue to run deficits at the present rate, our reserves will only last for another five years

Full accounts are available on request.

The Parish's main source of income is from renting out its various spaces . Rentals are administered by the Parish Administrator and the Vicar. Individual giving provides about one third of the parish's income. We sometimes also receive restricted grants for specific purposes, such as providing ESOL lessons.