

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE

An ecumenical partnership of Anglican, Baptist, Methodist,
Roman Catholic and United Reformed churches –
Creating an Oasis of Hope in Central Milton Keynes



PARISH PROFILE 2026

Contents

Page 3: From the Bishop of Buckingham

Page 3: From the leadership team

Page 4: A message from the Area Dean

Page 5: Who we are

Page 6: Our vision and mission

Page 6: Where would we like to be in three to five years' time?

Page 7: Strength and challenges

Page 8: A week in the life of our church

Page 9: Other users of our church

Page 10: A note from our Catholic partners

Page 11: Our parish and city

Page 12: Organisation and finance

Page 15: The vicarage

Page 16: The role - what you are called to do

Page 17: Our new vicar - the qualities we seek



From the Bishop of Buckingham

Christ the Cornerstone is the most visible Christian church in this city of over 300,000 people. It therefore offers a unique opportunity to lift the name of Jesus high and to serve and witness to this vibrant, growing young city.

The recent history of Cornerstone has been very challenging, but the sense of destiny to become a beacon of hope for the city has never been lost and is needed now more than ever.

The ecumenical dimension of this role offers opportunities to work in partnership across denominations, where relationships are strong. The wholehearted support of a very healthy deanery and a committed diocesan team can be taken as read.

As you will learn in the pages of this profile, there are great strengths to build with, including two full-time clergy colleagues, fabulous facilities, many links with the civic and local community and a congregation and Church Council with a desire to write a new chapter in the life of the church.

Challenges abound, not least the gathering together of diverse groups in the service of a compelling vision, built on the foundation of Jesus.

If you are up for an adventure with the Holy Spirit, secure in your identity in Christ, humbly confident in your ability to lead on a wide and visible stage and - most of all - sensing that the Lord is calling you to this role, please read these pages and get in touch for a conversation. We are praying for you.



From the leadership team

The Church of Christ the Cornerstone stands at the heart of the vibrant, multicultural and growing city of Milton Keynes - the spiritual heart of the city just across the road from the commercial heart, Marks and Spencer.

Established as an ecumenical congregation in the early 1980s, the current landmark building opened in 1992 and now serves a small parish (1.3 square miles) covering Central Milton Keynes. While there are some residential areas, the parish is largely dominated by shopping and commercial spaces.

The parish area is undergoing rapid change, with former office buildings being converted into apartments and new housing developments planned (as part of the government's recently announced 'New Town expansion') meaning the local population is expected to grow significantly.

Most of the congregation travel in from across Milton Keynes rather than living within the parish and the church reflects a rich cultural and ethnic diversity. The hospitality we offer is of core importance to our ministry.

Despite the city's outward affluence, issues such as deprivation and homelessness are evident, with many people seeking help or sanctuary in the building each day.

Owned by the Cornerstone Trust and managed by Cornerstone Trading (MK) Ltd, the building is open seven days a week and includes a shop, café and rented office space, alongside a chapel open daily for private prayer. Following a recent Episcopal Visitation recommending significant organisational changes, this is an exciting, challenging time for those involved in leading this unique community.

A message from the Area Dean

There is a famous boulevard which runs through the middle of Central Milton Keynes. The story goes that some of the budding architects responsible for planning the "new town of Milton Keynes" were inspired by a heady mix of the Solstice, soft drugs and Pink Floyd music and so orchestrated the alignment of this boulevard with the Midsummer sunrise. Their hope was to "relate this otherwise culture less object to the cosmos".

Along either side of the boulevard they planned offices, flats and a boundary-breaking shopping centre...and 23,000 car parking spaces. This was in the era of blackouts, strikes and four day working weeks. To build a temple to commerce accessible only by cars fuelled by unaffordable petrol seemed short-sighted. One of these young architects reflected "Someone would've said in 1972, what do you need all those parking spaces for? We thought we were making historic moves of the pen. We weren't trying to satisfy the demands of that day".

The spirit of those forward thinking, pioneering and courageous architects is the same spirit that inspired the courageous pioneering of the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, which sits on the corner of Midsummer Boulevard.

Though there was a group of Christians who met to worship together each week, the church that they dreamt of was never a church just for them, a building which would serve merely their own needs. They too were not interested in building only with the 'demands of that day' in mind. They dreamt of a city-centre church which was visible to all, open to all and accessible by all. They made plans and laid foundations which would serve this prophetic vision, trusting that the whole city of Milton Keynes would be spoken to by this building and the congregation it housed.

The pioneers of this church imagined a day when the Church was not divided along party or style lines, but was united by worship and by cause. They imagined a church building which was instantly recognisable as a church, but was also home to community services, businesses and civic life: a heart, beating with vibrancy at the very centre of the city.

The church which is presented in this profile owes

a huge debt to these pioneers. Their dream is still alive, and the harvest field is still ripe!

You will see from the preceding pages that there is much to celebrate about the life and work of Cornerstone. It is also true that between those early days of planning and today's moment of vacancy, there have been bumps in the road. Many of these are complex and painful, and not all are fully resolved...but that is ok; a vision as grand as this will inevitably not be plain sailing every single day.

Meanwhile, the church is home to community groups, choirs, concerts, those seeking help with learning English, other hosted congregations and much more besides.

As a new vicar at Cornerstone, you would of course be joining the Deanery of Milton Keynes. In many ways, the entire deanery reflects the journey of Cornerstone. It has grown up while the city has expended, but has sometimes struggled to keep pace. It has tried brave missionary ideas and worked hard to continually communicate grace to the residents of the city despite historical under-funding and loss of clergy numbers. It too, however, finds itself at the beginning of a new dawn, with renewed hope, strategising and praying to do Kingdom work in MK with the future in mind. We are working in partnership with the diocese to resource and support mission in new and innovative ways to serve a large, growing and exciting city.

We are a happy and supportive bunch of clergy friends and look forward to welcoming you to MK...which is a great place to live; full of excitement, entrepreneurial edge and also natural beauty (though we try to keep that bit secret from the advertising campaigns!)

As you read this profile and consider this role we know that you will be seeking the voice of the Spirit, discerning whether this is the right place for you. Whatever you decide, we are praying for you in this moment & for the enormous potential of Cornerstone to be fully realised...maybe you could be a part of that adventure?!

*Big blessings on you,
Paul*

Who we are

We are a diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community. We are blessed to have a growing number of children and young people who come.

Our Sunday school and young people's group is growing and thriving - nearly doubling in size to over 20 in the past 2 years.

Our ecumenical church council became a CIO (incorporated charitable organization) in May 2024. Church council members are the charity trustees.

There is also a PCC with 2 church wardens. Discussions are ongoing about how the CIO and PCC work together in keeping with other local best practice.



Recent discussions show we have a very strong commitment from our members for our ecumenical ethos and structure. We are now celebrating 34 years together in our amazing church building.

We have a team of over 70 volunteers who help our services run smoothly and

also help the building to be open 7 days a week. They support our café, shop and reception.

Our chapel is open for private prayer till 8pm, 5 days a week, plus most of Saturday.

Our lay pastoral workers provide a welcome and listening ear to those who come to us for advice or comfort. Our building is easily accessible by those who use wheelchairs.

We have a very strong tradition of excellent

music in our services, led by our music director. He also leads a separate, but closely associated, organization called 'Cornerstone Music', who

perform choral concerts in our building and elsewhere.

In 1992 when our new building was opened (in the presence of HM Queen Elizabeth II), we had a clergy team with 5 members, representing our parent denominations. The cost of this was heavily subsidized. We now have a team with:



■ One full time Anglican vicar (vacancy)

■ A URC minister who usually works 0.75 of the week for us, but is currently working 90% of the week for us during the vacancy - Rev George Mwaura (above)

■ A Roman Catholic Priest who has responsibility for 5 other Catholic congregations in addition to Cornerstone - Rev Fr Francis Higgins (left)

■ A full-time stipendiary curate, starting in September

We also have 2 LLMs, Grace and Krou, and Deacon Jon who represents Fr Francis on our church council.

We are keen to recognize that local and city wide links are of equal importance to the Church of Christ the Cornerstone.

Some would say that the location and story of Christ the Cornerstone creates a 'cathedral-sized' opportunity for mission beyond the parish that has yet to be fully realized.



Our vision and mission

We wish for our church leaders, ecumenical church council and our members to hold our mission 'to create an oasis of hope in Central Milton Keynes' at the heart of all they do - and to plan, encourage and implement real change, leading to opportunities to:

- Develop the understanding of Christian discipleship within our ecumenical context
- Enhance the ways we serve the communities of Central Milton Keynes.
- Encourage Christian learning at all stages of our lives
- Encourage young Christians on their road to faith
- Promote social justice
- Review the ways we worship together
- In short - a precious commission.

The challenge to us all is to bring all that we have to the service of our Lord and for the witness of the kingdom.

We seek to be a Holy Spirit led church in a 21st century city, where:

- God is at the centre of all that we are and do
- The Holy Spirit guides all our actions
- Teaching and nurturing is practised and cherished
- There is a secure space for all irrespective of their backgrounds
- Everyone is valued and can contribute
- We stand for justice, mercy and equality
- We help every pilgrim to the oasis to drink
- We practise values that safeguard the integrity of God's Creation.

Where would we like to be in three to five years' time?

We see a future of renewal, growth and deeper impact: a more unified ecumenical community, a growing and more diverse congregation, a confident city-centre presence, and a financially sustainable and well-ordered church.

We aim to release gifts and foster leadership, deepen our spiritual life, and remain a place of prayer, justice and hospitality.

More specifically, our hopes for the future include:

- Building on our efforts to act as an Oasis of Hope in Milton Keynes: a sanctuary of peace and spiritual refreshment that welcomes all
- Deepening our Ecumenical identity - renewing purposeful ecumenical activity and unity across traditions
- Having a greater community presence: engaging actively with civic, business and voluntary sectors
- Deepening our commitment to social justice and care for creation through the pursuit of just living and environmental stewardship

- Developing our commitment to the arts and to music as part of Cornerstone's mission to the city: in worship, and through community arts and music activities
- Growing as an inclusive and diverse community, open to all and keen to understand varied perspectives

We asked our congregations about what their future hopes and dreams for Cornerstone were. We also asked what they thought the role of the new Vicar should be. We had 22 pages of responses to distil and order!

The list of our agreed hopes for the future is shown in the bullet points above.

The priorities given for the role of the new Vicar are shown on the next page.

We were delighted that there was so much agreement amongst our members about these priorities.

Strengths and challenges

We have a generous congregation but we have some financial challenges. (please see later 'Organisation and finance' section for more details).

Catholic Mass on Saturday and Sunday morning Protestant services are well attended. We are very aware, however, that we need to build better links between these two communities. The new vicar will be pushing at an open door as they find ways, with us, to build those links.

We are proud to host Civic services in our building on occasions and Milton Keynes City Council are one of our best customers for lettings. The Bishop's visitation report of 2025 urges us to build even better links with civic authorities. Several years ago one of our ministerial team had the specific responsibility of being chaplain to the city centre.

Since the funding for this post was removed, we feel we have not been able to develop the necessary links with civic leaders and local businesses that we would have liked to. We are keen to help our new vicar to revisit and refresh these connections.

We are extremely proud of our musical heritage and our congregations are very appreciative of

our excellent choir and music director. However, looking forward, there is room for a wider range of musical styles to reflect the culturally diverse nature of our membership.

Cornerstone is part of the Milton Keynes Deanery and an active member of 'Churches Together in Milton Keynes'.

We have a strong social justice group. We currently hold a bronze Eco Church award and are working towards silver.

We mentioned above our amazing team of volunteers - they are a real strength. However, as members get older, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new volunteers to replace them.

We have a strong on-line prayer network, WhatsApp group and e-mail information service. However, we are aware that some aspects of our communication need improving. Our website is currently being updated. This is very much a work in progress.

The recent Bishop's visitation report contains much good news, but its recommendations list several challenges for us. Not least of these is a significant re-organisation of our structure.



A week in the life of our church

The church is open 8am to 8pm every weekday providing private prayer in the chapel, and advice, help, and a listening ear to anyone who comes into the church, whatever their needs or problems. Some of the volunteers who staff the reception desk and help in the Café are Cornerstone church members, but several are members of other churches across Milton Keynes.

Worship and prayer

We meet for worship, prayer and fellowship. There is a weekly service on Sunday mornings at 10.00am, which is also live-streamed (<https://www.youtube.com/@christthecornerstone>) and Holy Communion is observed twice a month. The Free Church Minister and Anglican vicar plan worship for these services and the service on the fourth week of each month is usually an 'All-Age' service.

Music is important in our services and the choir is much appreciated. Choir practice is on a Friday evening. Our Music Director also leads a 'Young Voices' choir with about 20 members, which practices earlier on Fridays.

Cornerstone 'Church at Home' meets online every Sunday evening at 6.00pm in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. Evensong services are held about once a month in the worship area at 6.00pm.

There is a Vigil Mass held every Saturday at 5.30pm and a Mass is held weekly on Mondays at 12.30pm.

A variety of other services are held across the Christian calendar, as well as welcome services for new senior leaders of denominations related to Milton Keynes and other occasional civic or community services. This is part of Cornerstone's role as a City Centre Church. Live streaming is undertaken regularly and not only of church services but special services including funerals and memorials.

The chapel is well used by members of the public, many regularly coming to pray on their way to or from work or shopping in the city centre.

Prayers are said for the City of Milton Keynes every Friday in the chapel. A Rosary prayer group meets weekly in the chapel on Wednesday lunchtimes.

There is also a very active WhatsApp Prayer Group which posts prayers every weekday. Bible study groups are held weekly on Zoom on Wednesdays

with additional groups during Advent and Lent. Our prayer network is also very much appreciated and the information is held confidentially by those involved.

There is a growing ministry with children and young people on Sundays with children attending aged between 4 and 19, supported by 7 volunteers. It has two groups; one group for under 8 year olds and another for ages 8 and 18. There is also a recently formed young adults group with about 15 members who are growing in faith and building a Christian Community together.

After every Sunday service refreshments are served in the Guildhall and many people participate in what is a vibrant and flourishing time of fellowship. Bring and Share lunches are also held on special occasions in the Guildhall.

During the week, including Saturdays, the Cornerstone Café provides delicious home-made food with a safe, welcoming environment for people to meet - friends or family meeting after shopping in the city centre or social workers meeting their clients. It is a major source of outreach to the public. The café also provides work experience for people with special needs. Our shop sells a wide range of cards, religious books, fair trade food and goods and is well patronised.

Our pastoral workers and receptionists are on hand to welcome people to the building and to offer a listening ear to those who enter. They are able to refer those in need to other services within the city eg homeless support, food bank, social services.

The Ecumenical Partnership employs an administrator for 10 hours a week. The office is opposite the reception desk.



Other users of our church

The Cornerstone church building is home to several long-term tenants including:

- Milton Keynes Community Foundation with a long lease of the south wing, which is occupied by Centre for Integrated Living, a local charity open 3 days a week and helps those with all forms of disability and there are other groups sponsored by MK Community Foundation helping those with special needs using this area.

Other tenants include:

- Community Learning (MK Council) have administrative offices here and also provides courses for young people who have not done well in their school education.
- Talkback gives one-to one support to those with autism.
- The English Language House provides English language tuition.
- Fabz and Leo have a barber's salon here too.
- Ukraine Appeal has an office here.

There are many other organisations who use the church building including:

- NHS Blood Donation Service
- Hindu lunch club for the elderly
- MK Chorale practise every Tuesday evening
- MK Climate Action Network and Climate Café
- Trubys Garden Tearoom - an interfaith community café run by Muslim women
- Tai chi, Taekwondo and yoga sessions

In these many ways, in addition to our church services, and civic involvement, Cornerstone gives Christian witness to Milton Keynes City Centre.

As the City grows, Cornerstone needs to further develop its mission and outreach. Cornerstone is a vibrant, growing church family, a very diverse and hospitable ecumenical community.

There is a very positive feeling within Cornerstone about the future. We are a diverse and exciting Christian community which can rise to the challenge of a City growing in size and importance, if provided with appropriate leadership.

Pastoral Care of the Congregation

Pastoral care of the congregation is important for Cornerstone and has several aspects. The Pastoral Friend Scheme is a way of keeping in touch with church members in a very light-touch way. It is gentle, friendly and confidential. Our team of Pastoral Friends each care for about ten members of the Congregation, keeping in touch with their members about once a month.

The Cornerstone Prayer Network is central to the church's Christian fellowship and is an online means of supporting people who have asked for prayers or for people in need of prayer.

Social Justice

The Social Justice Group seeks to ensure that Cornerstone works for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Sometimes this will be by the Group and Group members acting on behalf of Church of Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership (CCEP), such as organising events, issuing statements and participating in external activities as representatives of CCEP, and at other times by the Group prompting other committees and church members to act.

Eco Church

Cornerstone is a Bronze level Eco Church and is following the Eco Church 'Framework for Action' demonstrating that the Church is good news for God's Earth. Cornerstone has committed to achieve Silver and Gold Award status by 2026 and 2030 respectively..

Cornerstone Baby and Toddlers Group

The Baby and Toddlers Group welcomes between fifteen and twenty families most weeks and recently new carers have continued to attend as word has spread about the friendliness of the group, the fabulous space and excellent provision being offered.

A diverse group of mothers, fathers, grandparents and childminders participated and by the end of 2025 over sixty families had been hosted. The group provides fun activities for our families, including painting, playdoh, craft activities, role play, stories and singing.

A note from our Catholic partners

Christ the Cornerstone Church is not a Catholic parish in its own right but is located in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes - the church of Our Lady of Lourdes was sited in Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes but moved to its current location on the campus of St Paul's School in Leadenhall.

Our Lady of Lourdes is one of 5 parishes covering a significant part of Milton Keynes, plus Newport Pagnell and Woburn Sands that make up the St Barnabas Cluster of Parishes. The cluster is served by a clergy team of 2 priests - Canon Francis Higgins and Fr Mark Owen - supported by 2 permanent deacons - Rev Klaus Reidel and Rev Jon Walls.

Mass is celebrated at Cornerstone on a Saturday evening at 5:30pm - the vigil mass of Sunday - and on Monday at 12:30pm (excludes Bank Holidays).

Although not a separate parish, Christ the Cornerstone has a clear identity of its own with its own charisms. Its central location and the size of the Worship Area make it the ideal location for larger "cluster celebrations" such as on the Feast of St Barnabas where the people of all the cluster parishes can gather to worship. Similarly, the celebration of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday at Christ the Cornerstone provides an opportunity for people from across the cluster who have joined the Order of Christian Initiation Course to be welcomed into the church through reception

of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

The central location in Milton Keynes presents an opportunity for those who work in central Milton Keynes to attend mass on the Monday lunchtimes and on days like Ash Wednesday when they can also receive ashes on their foreheads - typically the mass on Ash Wednesday is attended by over 300 worshippers.

The dynamic nature of the population of Milton Keynes and the "shop around" nature of much of modern life does create a transient element in the congregation with people arriving in one part of the city and after a while moving on to a new area. There is also an element of people attending the "church they like" in favour of the church in whose parish they reside which adds to the transient nature in the congregation and presents a challenge in terms of planning and finance.

The Ecumenical nature of Christ the Cornerstone highlights the importance of collaboration and the necessity of a positive working relationship between the different congregations (both ministerial and lay) and it is pleasing to note that there is Catholic representation in the various activities within the church including staffing the reception desk and membership on working parties and committees.



Our parish and city

Our parish was formed only fifty-five years ago in response to the publication of The Milton Keynes Plan by the government in 1970. At that time there were no completed buildings or roads. It is now the central area of a city with some 300,000 inhabitants.

It stretches for about four kilometres from Milton Keynes Central railway station in the southwest to the Grand union canal in the northwest. It is one kilometre in width with the grid road Portway on the north and Childs Way on the south. It is on a hill above much of the surrounding areas. (This is 0.6 of a mile wide and 2.6 mile long if you use Imperial measure.)

The church building is in the centre of the parish area and the nearby buildings include the Civic Offices, two major shopping malls, Police station and both Civil and Criminal Courts. There are numerous office buildings including the UK headquarters of Santander Bank and the HQ of the Institute of Chartered Accountants. There are several hotels, MK Theatre, MK Art Gallery and buildings for cinema and other leisure activities.

The parish includes Campbell Park an area of civic open space adjoining the main city centre. It is park land on a slope leading from the centre down to the canal. There is some residential development in this area and proposals for many more apartments in blocks of three to five storeys. This development has been delayed as the growth of 'working from home' has caused the redundancy of existing office blocks which are now being converted into living space.

The residential population of the parish is less than 8,000 (4707 in 2021, so it's growing quickly.) with most living in apartments rather than two storey houses. Even after 50 years it remains a place of great change.

STOP PRESS: The government has recently announced that Milton Keynes is one of the locations for 'New Town expansion', aiming to build 40,000 more homes here. About half of these are likely to be in our parish, in CMK and Campbell Park. This will affect the demographics of the parish hugely. Watch this space!

Very few of our regular worshippers live in the parish. Most of our congregations live in other parts of the city and beyond. The last formal

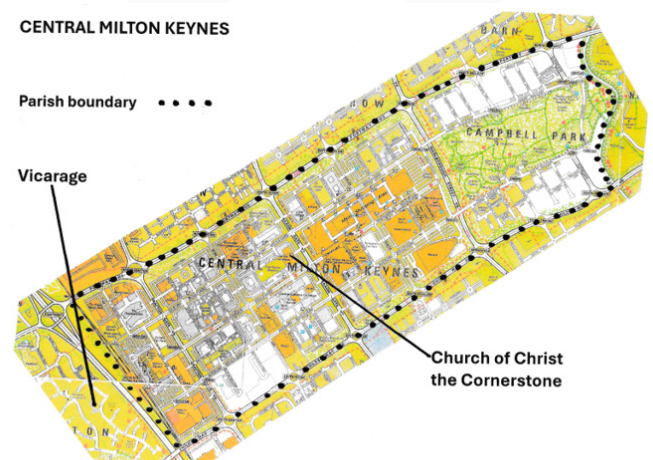
population count of the city noted that 38.7% of the population had a non- British background. Our congregations have a majority with African, Asian or Caribbean cultures as their heritage as well as others. We have all come to Milton Keynes or are the children that have moved here, so we are all immigrants.

This and the city-wide natures of the hiring of our building encourages us to consider our mission to the whole city not just the City Centre. Milton Keynes City boundary includes the whole of Milton Keynes Deanery plus Newport Pagnell Deanery.

The area of the 'new town' development surrounding the parish has numerous housing areas bounded by city grid roads. All of the neighbouring parish areas operate as Ecumenical Partnerships. Within these adjoining areas is MK University Hospital and HMP Woodhall, both with salaried multi faith chaplains.

There are numerous schools and a College of Further Education, the Open University, and Cranfield University and Buckingham University close by. Our city is fortunate as there are substantial areas of parkland with full public access and under single management by a charity (The Parks Trust - www.theparkstrust.com) throughout the new town development.

Milton Keynes community has evolved since the New Town development pioneering days but is still growing. Our local authorities and voluntary bodies retain a readier acceptance of new ideas than most other places.



Organisation and finance

How is Cornerstone organised?

We are a partnership of the Baptist Union, Church of England, Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church.

Here is a quick guide to our 3 main parts:

1. THE CORNERSTONE TRUST - <u>the</u> owners of the building
<p>This charitable trust owns the church building. The Trust was set up to 'provide a building for religious purposes' in Central Milton Keynes and to make sure the building is well looked after and maintained. <i>The trustees of Cornerstone Trust are the regional leaders of our sponsoring churches (Baptist, URC, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Church of England) plus two lay members.</i></p>
2. CORNERSTONE TRADING (MK) LTD – the managers of the building
<p>The Cornerstone Trust set up CORNERSTONE TRADING (MK) LIMITED to manage the building on its behalf and to raise money to keep the building properly maintained. Cornerstone Trading promotes events and manages lettings, the café and shop. The income it raises pays for the upkeep and maintenance of the building. It pays for insurance, servicing of equipment, decoration, cleaning, repairs, improvements, replacements, etc. Any profit the Trading Company makes is placed by the Cornerstone Trust into a reserve fund for the upkeep and repair of the building to ensure its future for the long term. The deeds of the Trust specify this money cannot be used for any other purpose. The amount of profit made in any year depends on both the level of income and how much maintenance and repair work has been needed during the year. <i>Cornerstone Trading employs a small team (our building and business managers, the café manager and part time admin staff.) <u>A large number of volunteers support the work of the Trading Company by staffing the reception desk each day till 8pm, working in the café and helping in the shop. These volunteers are essential in enabling the huge range of activities to take place in the building every week. There are some <u>long term</u> tenants in parts of the building including English Language House, Centre for Integrated Living, Adult Continuing Education and even a <u>barbers!</u></u></i> The Directors of Cornerstone Trading (MK) ltd are all present or past members of the church congregations – and the current Chair is Rev George Mwaura. It has been the convention for a member of the clergy team to be a Trading Company Director, but it is not a formal requirement of the vicar's post.</p>
3. CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP <i>(Usually referred to as 'The Church of Christ the Cornerstone')</i> – the people of the church
<p>Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership is made up of THE PEOPLE who are members of the church and who come here to worship. The Cornerstone Trust, as owner of the building, licences the Ecumenical Partnership to use parts of the building in return for a monthly service charge towards heating, lighting and upkeep. This annual charge is roughly equal to the upkeep costs of the building for one day a week. The Ecumenical Partnership has an elected 'Ecumenical Church Council' and raises money from its members to pay for clergy and the cost of services but does not have to pay for any repairs and maintenance. When we refer to 'the church's budget', it is this money we are talking about. Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership became a CIO in May 2024.</p>
We thank God for the foresight and wisdom of the pioneers and the first Cornerstone Trust who made Cornerstone a reality.
<p>It would not be realistic to expect a church membership the size of ours to pay all the costs to keep our large building going. Our founders realised this and planned accordingly. Sharing our building can occasionally be difficult, but it has the advantage that the church budget does not have to pay for any repairs and maintenance. It also gives us the opportunity to welcome a great range of people to our building and deliver our objective to be an Oasis of Hope in Central Milton <u>Keynes..</u></p>

1. Organisation: Some background

The organisation and structure of Cornerstone is outlined in the chart on the next page. It seems quite complicated on first sight! The 'Cornerstone Trust' owns the building and is the sole shareholder of 'Cornerstone Trading (MK) Ltd' which manages the building on the Trust's behalf. 'Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership' is the worshipping community that uses the building.

Understanding the relationship between the Cornerstone Trust, Cornerstone Trading (MK) Ltd and Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership (CCEP) is key to understanding our organisation and finances.

Until recently, the main Cornerstone Trust trustees have been the regional denominational leaders of our parent denominations. (The Bishop of Buckingham, Chair of the Northampton Methodist District, The Bishop of Northampton (RC), Moderator of the URC East Midlands District, Team Leader/Regional Minister Central Baptist Association.) In addition there have been 2 lay trustees. (There have been some recent changes to the holders of these regional posts, and there may be some changes to those who hold trusteeship.)

The income of Cornerstone Trading (MK) Ltd (the Trading Company) is from a combination of lettings and other commercial activities including the shop and café. This income is vital to fund the upkeep of the building.

The Bishop of Oxford's visitation recent report suggests that the ownership of Cornerstone Trading is passed on to the Ecumenical Church Council, which is now a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). This would be a major change and considerable legal advice will be needed to support the church council if this change is to take place. Our new Anglican appointment would, we hope, play a major role in the management of this possibility.

Some believe that this restructuring would go a long way towards solving our financial problems. However, this is not proven. The Trading Company generally does do a good job in commercialising the use of the building - it is well used and often fully booked. It is hard to see how lettings income could be greatly increased without pricing ourselves out of the market. Of itself changing the shareholding structure of the company would do nothing to improve the underlying financial position.

(In the past there have, on occasions, been tensions over lettings. Due to hard work on the part of several individuals, these tensions have significantly lessened recently.)

2. Organisation: The Ecumenical Church Council and PCC

Christ the Cornerstone Ecumenical Partnership (CCEP) became a CIO in May 2024 and its constitution complies with the model constitution for ecumenical partnerships agreed by the Ecumenical Officers of our parent denominations. The church council meets at least 8 times a year and is responsible for the CIO's finances. All clergy are ex-officio members of the church council.

Until fairly recently, Christ the Cornerstone did not have a PCC, its responsibilities (as with all the other denominations) having been delegated to the church council. Vestry meetings were held at the start of our congregational meetings when church wardens or deanery synod representatives needed to be appointed. The church wardens attended church council meetings as contributors and observers, rather than voting members.

Our previous Anglican minister decided a PCC should be set up in the run up to the change to becoming a CIO. Our ecumenical constitution means that many of the responsibilities an Anglican church PCC would normally have (eg finances, safeguarding) are dealt with by our ecumenical church council. So, there is a lack of understanding amongst some church members as to the purpose of the PCC. We would look for leadership from the new Anglican minister to help resolve this.

The current church council is in the process of altering its operating procedures to encourage better information exchange and liaison between itself and the PCC.

3. Finances

The Ecumenical Partnership (CCEP) is just about managing to balance its books, but does face significant financial challenges.

The CCEP budget pays for Protestant clergy costs, upkeep of services, employment of music director and administrator, fees to parent denominations, administration costs, etc. It is also responsible for paying the monthly service charge to the Trading company for energy, insurance, cleaning and maintenance.

The financing of our Roman Catholic presence

is separate from the CCEP budget. The offerings from the catholic congregations go to the local 'St Barnabas Cluster', who pay a service charge for use of the cornerstone building directly to the Trading Company

Our members are generous givers. We operate the Parish Giving Scheme, as well as weekly freewill offering envelopes and the opportunity to pay by banker's order. We introduced a card payment machine some months ago.

Wonderfully, our congregation is ethnically diverse and growing. We are trying to encourage more of our newer members to join one of the regular giving schemes, but we realise that many young families do not have the spare income to do this.

We rely mostly on the offerings of our congregations for our income, plus the gift-aid we are able to claim. As previously mentioned, lettings income goes to the Trading Company. The service charge we pay the Trading Company for the use of the building is reasonable and covers all the energy, insurance, repair and maintenance costs we might otherwise have.

The main problem is that a church membership of our size (121 currently) would only normally be supporting one clergy member, whereas we have to fund 1.75 posts. (Memberships are renewed every 2 years.)

This has been a long standing problem and has been discussed with our regional denominational leaders from time to time. One solution would be to reduce our ministerial team, but, as the Bishop's visitation report states - we really need 3 clergy to fulfil our role as a city centre church.

We have only managed due to the generosity of the URC church who have given us a 25% discount on their clergy costs and by not paying our full parish share to the Oxford Diocese.

For several years we have only been able to pay 50% of our parish share. For 2026, we have raised this a little to 55%, but we do realise the implication this has for the deanery.

It is our great hope that once our ministerial team is enhanced by the new appointment, their clear leadership and ministry will lead to a growth in numbers and commitment to giving within our congregation and that this will help ease our financial difficulty.

We also need to be better at fundraising! Every Christmas, members can sponsor the lighting of our dome in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary. We hold occasional sponsored bible reading events, cake sales, etc. but need to get to grips with a more organised approach to raising funds.

We do, however, have a successful Christmas Charity Appeal every year, raising about £5,000 for international and local charities.

In our financial year ending 31st January 2025, CCEP's income was £130,328 and expenditure £130,908. We have £99,336 invested with CCLA in reserves. The full accounts for 2025 are available in our annual report which is available with this document.

Please note that we are not aware of any local trusts that would expect any new member of our clergy team to inherit any responsibilities with them.



The vicarage



1 Cottage Common, Loughton, MK5 8AE

The vicarage is located just outside the parish. Cottage Common is a cul-de-sac of about 20 detached houses and number 1 is on the corner of the entrance to Redland Drive. There is a small walled garden at the rear.

On the opposite side of Redland Drive is an open grassed area and a foot and cycle route up to MK Central railway station (less than 1 kilometre) and on to Midsummer Boulevard and the church, which is approximately 2 kilometers from the house.

The route by car is longer using the city grid road system and there is free parking in the church car park (useful as public parking in the city centre is subject to charge.)

The house was built in the late 1970s and was purchased by the diocese from the developer, so it has always been a vicarage. It has 4 double bedrooms, two with en-suite facilities, a fifth single room and a bathroom on the first floor. On the ground floor there is a hall, cloakroom, 2 reception rooms, a kitchen and a separate utility room. The hall gives separate access to a small study and there is garaging for 2 cars.

There are primary schools in the Loughton grid square and a secondary school within 2 kilometres in a local centre with a Sainsbury's supermarket and local shops. The city centre is close by in the other direction with its large shopping centre,

cinemas, theatre and many restaurants all within 1 to 3 kilometres of the house.

The vicarage is in the catchment area of CMK Medical Centre (NHS) where you can register with a doctor. The Medical Centre is in an area called Bradwell Common, about 3km away.

There are several well thought of private dental practices in the City Centre and in the estates near Loughton. Unfortunately, as in many other towns and cities, it is virtually impossible to register with an NHS dentist in Milton Keynes.



The role - what you are called to do

We seek a Minister, who, in partnership with our ecumenical ministerial team:

- Will help us develop the understanding of Christian discipleship within our ecumenical context
 - Will minister to the pastoral and spiritual needs of our congregation, our parish and those from the wider city who come into our building seeking help
 - Will seek to build stronger relationships with the people of our parish and the civic authorities
 - Is a team player
 - Will offer the richness that the Anglican tradition can contribute to our ecumenical heritage
 - Is a confident and collaborative leader who has a good track record of leading teams
 - Is able to manage workload by identifying priorities and concentrate on actions most needed now (but also bears in mind dreams for the future...)
 - Will help us identify and develop the talents and gifts amongst our lay members
 - Is comfortable in leading worship in a variety of styles
 - Takes a particular interest in encouraging young Christians on their road to faith
- Will promote social justice
 - Will play a full part in considering the best ways to implement recommendations from the recent visitation report

This is a daunting list! However, we are not looking for a superhuman or a saint! We understand only too well that not everything can be done at once. This is not a conventional parish role - (perhaps more like a 'cathedral role') - an opportunity to help shape the future of a visible, public, city-centre church.

We can offer:

- A diverse and welcoming church family, prayer, friendship and fellowship
- A very welcoming ministerial team
- Shared commitment to meeting the challenges identified
- Expectation to protect your days off and holidays
- Support for retreats and ministerial development
- A very pleasant vicarage in a quiet residential area, within walking distance of the City Centre and the railway station
- Supportive colleagues in the Milton Keynes Council of Churches and the Deanery
- Life in the 'City of Trees' - a city like no other!



Our new vicar - the qualities we seek

We are seeking a priest in the Church of England who will lead Cornerstone with faith, imagination, and a deep commitment to unity in diversity.

As an ecumenical partnership at the heart of Milton Keynes, we value the breadth of traditions and perspectives within our community and are looking for a vicar who will celebrate this richness while drawing us together around a clear and shared vision.

The person we seek will be a gifted pastor and collaborator.

Someone who listens attentively, nurtures relationships, and engages confidently both within the church and across the wider civic and interfaith life of the city.

Through inspiring preaching, thoughtful communication, and a visible presence, they will help us to grow in discipleship and service.

We are also looking for a creative and reflective leader who can discern how God is calling Cornerstone to develop in the years ahead, making wise and imaginative use of our city-centre building for worship, learning, and community engagement.

This will include enabling others to recognise and use their gifts, exploring fresh ways of expressing the Christian faith, and offering strategic leadership that balances vision with practical delivery.

Our new vicar will be someone who is at ease working across different contexts, pastoral, civic, and digital, and who can communicate clearly and confidently in all of them, helping Cornerstone

to remain a welcoming, relevant, and faithful presence in Milton Keynes.

Person Specification: Essential

- Ability to provide compassionate, attentive pastoral care
- Commitment to living and sharing the Gospel of Christ, with the ability to engage confidently with the civic and business communities of the city
- Commitment to and championing of diversity and inclusivity (ecumenical, cultural, social, spiritual)
- Ability to discern, encourage and develop a shared vision and sense of purpose for the Cornerstone community and its city-centre ministry through listening and dialogue
- Ability to offer collaborative leadership and to plan strategically with colleagues and the wider community
- Ability to communicate clearly and engagingly in preaching, teaching, writing, and digital media

Person Specification: Desirable

- Confidence in using digital communication tools (social media, websites, livestreaming)
- Ability to drive
- Experience of working with young people
- Experience of engaging with issues of social and environmental justice



The Cornerstone Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

Be the Cornerstone of your people in this city.

In the task of building a city church guide us with your counsel, support us with your strength, unite us with your spirit.

Grant, Lord, that the doors of this church may be open to the world; its round sanctuary may speak of your wholeness; its high dome may tell of your transforming presence; its crowning cross may proclaim your saving love.

Here, teach your people to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with you.

Here may we learn from you to give good news to the poor, to bring sight to the blind, to set captives free.

Christ our Cornerstone, set us all close to you as living stones to make a spiritual house for God.

Amen.



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A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world