

THE PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

Appointment of
Team Rector,
Abingdon-on-Thames.

"We aim to worship God, to grow in faith and to share Jesus Christ, by honouring the past, while celebrating the present and growing into the future."







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Foreword

Dear potential applicants,

I am delighted that you are reading this profile and encourage you to pray about whether this position might be the role to which God is now calling you.

The benefice of Abingdon-on-Thames is seeking a new Team Rector who will lead this benefice in a prayerful, approachable and collaborative manner. They will be community oriented and will be warm, empathetic and compassionate ... but with a sense of humour. The priest appointed will be a good listener and will be excited about the opportunities and challenges ahead and still retain the excitement of their original call to ordained ministry.

This is a strategic and important post, with a significant leadership role heading up the talented and gifted team of clergy and lay leaders in the Team Ministry across the Abingdon churches, and, I trust, bringing experience, wisdom and input into the wider Deanery, Archdeaconry and Diocese.

You will find a friendly Deanery with supportive and experienced colleagues and talented lay people. The benefice recognises that they are under-represented in a number of key characteristics and would particularly welcome applications from those who would increase their diversity. Our Episcopal Area and Diocese are in good heart, expectant for all that God will do and thankful for all that God is doing.

Please pray about whether you might be the right minister to join us. If you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this important position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague to partner in the gospel.

With every blessing,

+ Gavin Dorchester

Rt. Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester





Welcome!

Thank you for taking an interest in our parish and our current vacancy. We are a group of three churches, all central to the historic market town of Abingdon-on-Thames.

Our parish lies on the Thames in south Oxfordshire, with Oxford eight miles to the north and the Berkshire Downs to the south. It is a lovely part of the country with a rural feel and with excellent bus links to local towns, and rail access to London from Didcot or Oxford stations.

The parish of Abingdon-on-Thames is a Team Ministry led by a Team Rector (who is also Vicar of St. Helen's Church) and assisted by a full-time Team Vicar, sharing the pastoral care of the congregations in St Helen's Church, St Nicolas' Church and St Michael and All Angels' Church.

Please do read on to find out more about our parish, our hopes and our challenges.

Who and where we are

We offer a breadth and richness of Anglican worship. St. Helen's is the big 'town' church with a central and fairly liberal tradition, St Nicolas' offers a broad church in a smaller, more intimate building, and worship at St. Michael & All Angels' is in the Anglo-Catholic tradition.

The three congregations share the encouragement of questioning and exploration of belief. A more evangelical approach to worship is provided by other churches in Abingdon.

Until about 12 years ago, the town was one parish and since then the central churches have been on a journey of developing more collaborative and supportive church life across our three congregations.

We very much wish to take this further, honouring our traditions and our differences, while embracing opportunities and the excitement of seeing how we can develop and grow in the future.

Abingdon is rapidly increasing in size with several housing estates under construction; although many of these are outside the parish there is great mobility among

congregation members, who travel to centres of worship they prefer. There is tremendous potential to forge closer links with our existing community and with those moving into new housing.

Like many congregations, our members are ageing but we have the will and the volunteers ready to be guided in attracting younger people, children and less experienced Christians to our faith and family. We look for leadership in this area.

We can offer a strong team of clergy and lay support. Our Team Vicar, Revd Paul Smith, is assisted by Revd Dr A.K.M. Adam, House for Duty (Associate Priest) and our part-time Associate Priest, Revd Dr Jennifer Brown. Two Licensed Lay Ministers (with permission to officiate), another who is in training, and a Licensed Preacher help out in the parish.

We are blessed with the support of seven retired clergy with Permission To Officiate who are generous of their time in taking Sunday and weekday services and occasional offices, and offering support with other parish and pastoral work.

Could you be our new Team Rector?

We are seeking a Team Rector who demonstrates:

Spiritual Depth and Theological Understanding

- Is rooted in a deep, reflective personal faith with the ability to engage with complex theological issues.
- Encourages theological literacy and open discussion.
- Embraces the distinctive liturgical traditions of each of our churches.

Pastoral Care and Community Engagement

- Is committed to pastoral care for all ages, including young families, the elderly, and those on the margins.
- Is a visible and approachable presence in the parish and wider community.
- Can offer leadership in developing links between the parish and many aspects of town life, including schools, public and civic bodies, and voluntary organisations.

Visionary Leadership and Management of Change

- Can inspire and guide the parish to develop and articulate a clear vision for our future.
- Can empower and lead the parish in fostering spiritual growth and an increase in our congregations.
- Working with the team clergy and laity, can manage effective change.

Communication and Administrative Skills

- Is a clear, proactive communicator who shares information openly and effectively.
- Is skilled at working collaboratively with clergy, laity, ecumenical partners and the wider community.
- Can oversee the administrative and financial affairs of the parish, including regulatory compliance, and is computer literate.

Personal qualities

- Is an emotionally intelligent and honest team leader who values collaboration, building trust and strong relationships across the parish.
- Will be a team leader who discerns, values and nurtures the gifts of others and is open to feedback.

What we can offer you

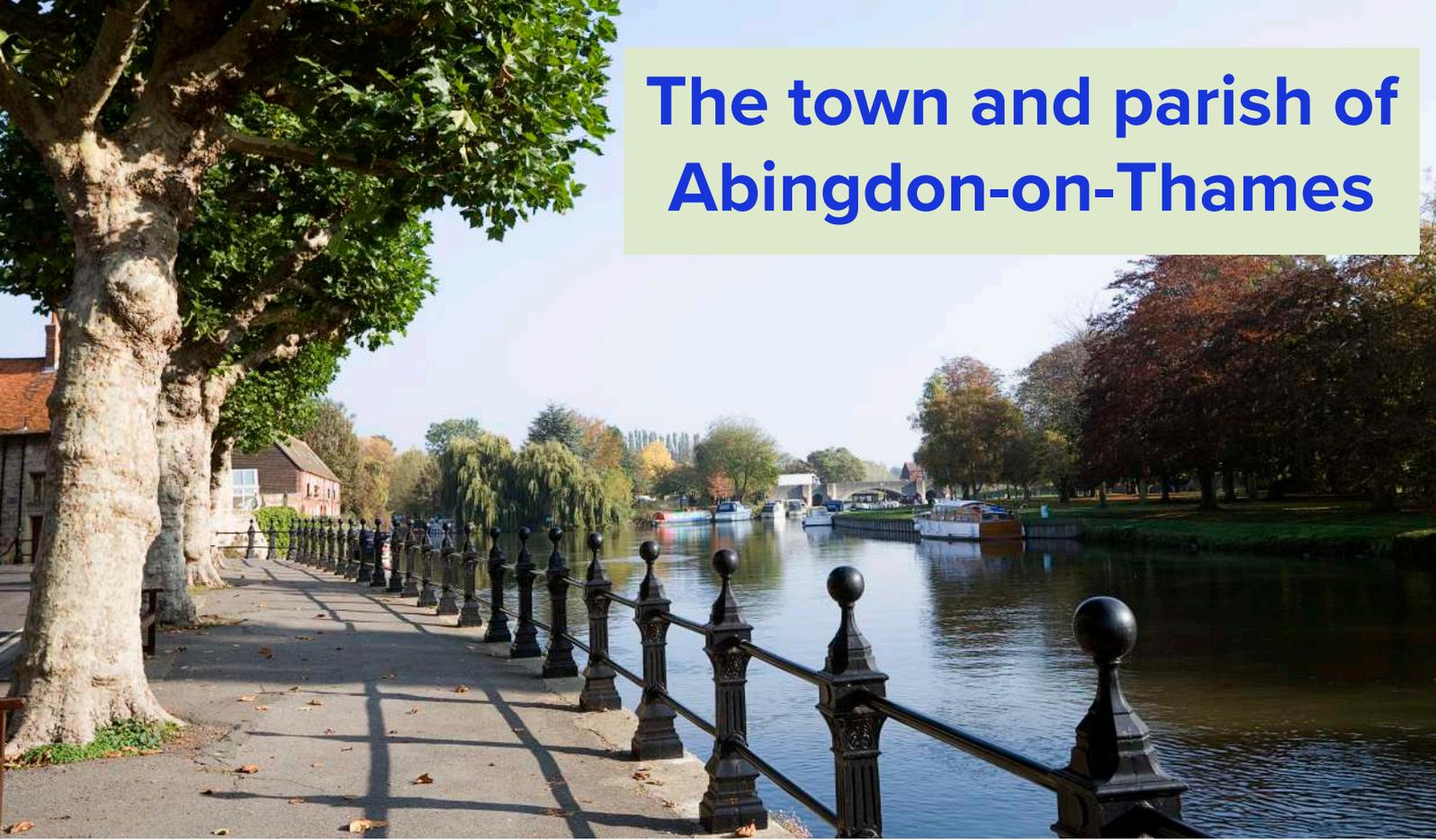
We take seriously the need for a good work-life balance and support the Diocese's suggestion for full-time ministers to enjoy a continuous 36 hour period of non-working time every week. Over the last five years both our clergy have taken sabbaticals, with financial support from their respective churches. We also encourage anyone ministering to our churches to take a retreat each year. The laity is committed and in most areas we have good volunteer support.

There is a paid Parish Administrator who works 24 hours a week on parish business.

Fellowship is important to us and we believe in supporting our brothers and sisters in their time of need and of rejoicing. Across the parish, our clergy will never be short of a sociable cup of coffee or a piece of cake!



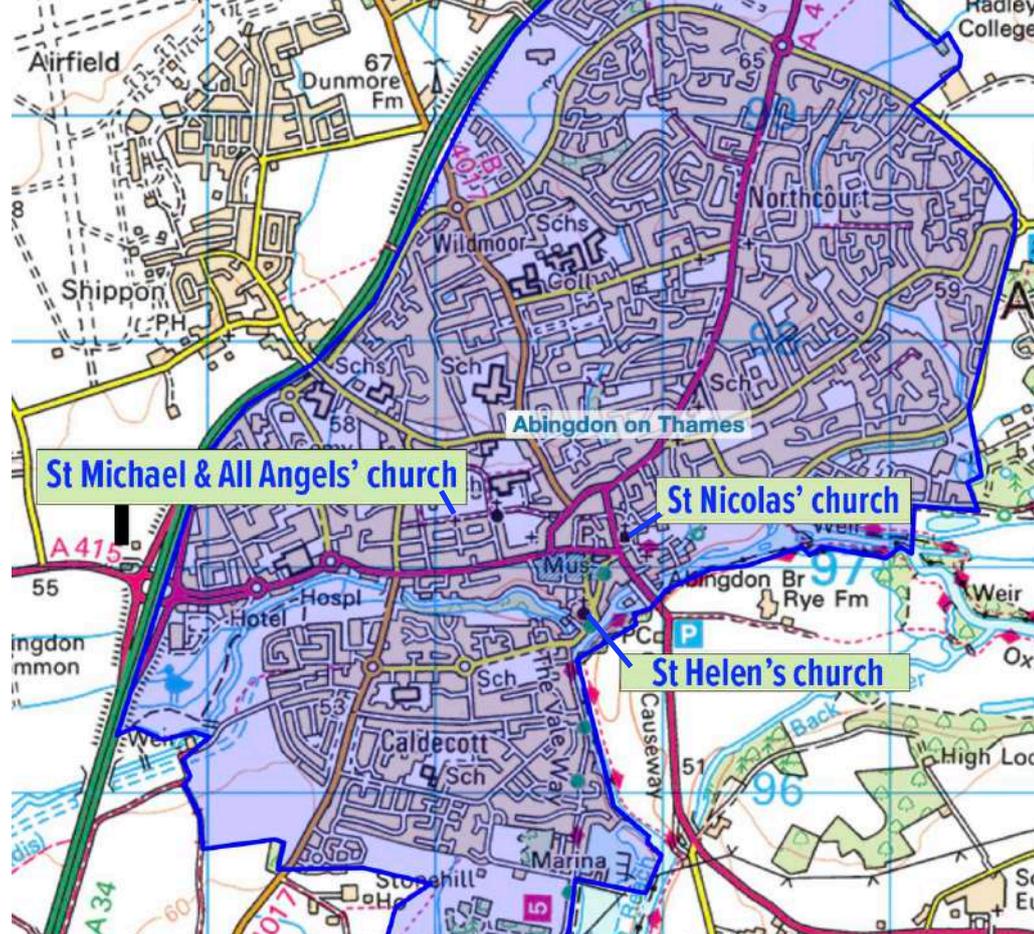
The town and parish of Abingdon-on-Thames



Abingdon is an historic town of over 35,000 people. For centuries it has been the focal point of a rich farming area with its weekly market on a Monday, its famous hiring street fair held in October, and was once known for its brewing industry of Morlands. Nowadays it is probably better known as the hub of internationally acclaimed centres for scientific research. The Culham Campus lies about four miles away, home of the UK Atomic Energy Authority and recently chosen as the UK's first national Artificial Intelligence Growth Zone. To the south is the Harwell Campus housing the Diamond Light Source and the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory employing some 1,200 scientists and engineers. With further Science parks in Abingdon, Oxford, and Milton Park it is no surprise that our congregations include many scientists!

The proximity of Oxford offers many other career prospects and we have a sprinkling of academics amongst our numbers. However, many do not share a comfortable lifestyle, and our parish includes one of the most deprived local government wards (Caldecott), falling within the 20% most deprived areas nationally. There are two foodbanks in the town, both of which are supported regularly by our parish with gifts and with volunteers by our congregations.

Within Abingdon there are nine state Primary Schools (including St Nicolas VA Church of England), three state secondaries, three independent



schools and two offering specialist provision (one state and one independent). The parish has links with some of these and would like to widen and deepen these relationships further. There is more information about them on the Abingdon Town website:

<https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/services/services-and-facilities/schools-adult-centres-and-colleges>



Abingdon is also on the cusp of change. About 900 new houses are currently under construction around the outskirts of the town and a Garden Village development is proposed for the Dalton Barracks land which is adjacent to the town and soon to be vacated by the army.

The town council has produced an Abingdon Town Neighbourhood Plan, laying out its plans for the redevelopment of the town over the next 15 to 20 years.

This can be accessed at <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Draft-Neighbourhood-Plan-July-2024.pdf>



Safeguarding

We take this very seriously and each church has its own safeguarding officer, under the overall leadership of the Parish Safeguarding Officer, Mrs. Pat Hudson. She is very active in encouraging congregants to take the requisite safeguarding courses and in following up DBS checks. Safeguarding is reported and discussed at all DCC and PCC meetings.

The worshipping community

The parish of Abingdon-on-Thames is the result of the formation of a Team Ministry in 1989 when the ancient parishes of St Helen's (including St Michael's church) and St Nicolas were united. In 2013 the very large parish encompassing the whole of Abingdon was divided into two with the southern/central section becoming the parish of Abingdon-on-Thames and the northern section becoming the parish of North Abingdon, centred on Christ Church and its daughter church at Long Furlong.

Our churches are also founding members of the Church in Abingdon (CiA <https://www.church-in-abingdon.org.uk/>), which was set up over 30 years ago as an ecumenical organisation to bring all the Christian churches together, now including 14 members.



The CiA provides umbrella support for a number of ecumenical activities such as Christian Aid, Church Twinning, the Abingdon Passion Play, and Street Pastors.

The town has become quite multi-cultural over the last decade and other faiths are now practised in our community.

Numbers on the Electoral Roll

	2022	2023	2024
St. Helen's	214	214	229
St. Nicolas'	64	63	62
St. Michael's	68	67	69
Total	346	344	360

Worship



Sunday

- 8am: Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion, alternating monthly between St Helen's and St Nicolas'.
- 9.30am: Sung Mass at St. Michael and All Angels'.
- 10.30am: Sung Eucharist at St. Helen's.
- 11.15am: Morning Prayer, or Holy Communion or Service of the Word at St Nicolas'.
- 5.30pm: An evening service (Taizé, Wholeness and Healing, Choral Evensong, or Sacred Concert) at St. Helen's.

Weekdays

- 9.10am: Morning Prayer (CW) at St. Helen's every day.
- 10.30am: Holy Communion at St. Helen's, Wednesdays.
- 12.30pm: Said Mass at St. Michael and All Angels', Tuesdays (winter) Thursdays (summer).

The principal services at St Helen's and St Nicolas' are broadcast via Zoom weekly, the sermons recorded and made available online. Where possible this approach is adopted for all major services. We are also introducing the option of Zoom broadcasting occasional offices if requested.

Major festivals are marked through a range of services offered in our three churches – each contributing in their own tradition. The congregations are used to coming together to worship for Ash Wednesday, Ascension Day, Trinity Sunday, Christmas Midnight Communion, and other festivals as appropriate.

Most services in church are led by the clergy or one of the supporting Licensed Lay Ministers or honorary assistants.

In addition monthly services of Holy Communion are offered in three town centre care homes and home Communion is administered to the housebound where possible, by both clergy and trained laity.



Music

Music features strongly across all three churches. St Helen's has a Director of Music/Organist and Assistant Organist; the robed choir is about 30 strong and growing in number, including children and teenagers. St Nicolas' and St Michael and All Angels' have regular organists and choirs. All three church buildings frequently host concerts, in a range of musical styles, including performers from within and beyond their congregations.





There is a large and dedicated band of tower- and hand-bell ringers who ring regularly at St Nicolas' and St. Helen's. A couple of their members train an enthusiastic band of young ringers.



Attendance across our Parish

Average attendance	2022	2023	2024
Christmas:	829	1098	975
Easter:	232	353	364
October average:	204	250	216
Usual Sunday:	184	192	190
Worshipping community:	217	353	342
Age of attenders	2022	2023	2024
0-17:	8	17	15
18-69:	33	69	96
Over 70:	21	196	231
Age unspecified:	155	71	0

Occasional Offices

Baptisms

Families wishing to have their children baptised are encouraged to attend joint baptism preparation sessions ('Journey into Christ') over two evenings, led by members of the ministry team assisted by lay people. There is also a possibility of a thanksgiving for the birth of a child if the parents do not want a baptism. There has been a recent growing interest in adult baptism.

Confirmation

Candidates who wish to be confirmed are prepared by the clergy and admitted into the church at liturgically significant points in the year.

Children are prepared for communion before confirmation.

Weddings

Couples wishing to marry are encouraged to attend shared preparation classes ('Circle of Love') over three evenings, led by a member of the clergy team supported where possible by the laity. In some years a wedding workshop has been held where the couples (from all churches) can meet the organists, flower arrangers, bellringers etc. to discuss what they would like for their weddings.

Funerals

Pastoral support for the dying and bereaved is important to us and funerals are celebrated in a dignified manner. Our clergy will preside at services at the local crematoria and attend burials.

	2022	2023	2024
Baptisms:	9	18	24
Weddings:	8	5	10
Funerals:	19	19	17

Living in Love and Faith

This is an area which as a parish we would like to explore further.

Life of the Church



All three churches have many ways of enriching faith and fellowship, some at a parish level, some by church.

St Helen's **Babies' and Toddlers' Group** has been running for many years with an average attendance of about 15 to 20 parents or carers and babies. The majority of these families do not attend regularly and we would like to develop closer links in this area.

A troop of **Beavers** and of **Cubs** meets each week in the Parish Centre and is affiliated to the church.

There are currently three **House Groups** meeting in the afternoon or evening across the parish. This is an area in which newcomers often express interest and it would be good to see it develop further.

Faith Forum is part of our adult education programme across the parish and meets monthly on Sundays at 12:30 for a light lunch followed by a talk (often from an outside speaker) followed by discussion. Recent themes have included **Science and faith, Christianity and the Arts** and **The Church and Disability**.

Agnostics Anonymous is the name of a monthly open meeting looking at popular religious dilemmas or conundrums. It was set up in order to show that it is all right to have questions and even doubts about various matters of faith, with an audience of both practising Christians (Anglicans and other denominations) and enquirers. Recent subjects have included **Does being religious make you a better person?** and **Evil and the God of Love**. With an average attendance of about 50-60 we seem to be filling a need!

The **Desiring Life** book group is an open, book-based discussion group which meets fortnightly in the Parish Centre.

With its beautiful labyrinth, St Michael and All Angels' offers the opportunity for **Silent Reflections**, a time for people to reflect for a while, to examine their lives in the stillness of a sacred space, to be open to an encounter with God. It is also the focus for circle dancing held regularly with an enthusiastic following.

There is a town wide **Mothers' Union** branch which meets regularly to hear a speaker or run an activity. They are instrumental in raising money (and cakes!) for holidays held locally for the families of prisoners.





Events

Each of the three churches runs regular events. St Helen's and St Michael and All Angels' both hold Christmas markets and host many concerts, cream teas, and St Helen's recently ran a **barn dance**. With its central position on the market square, St Nicolas' hosts concerts, art exhibitions and **Cards for Good Causes** in the run-up to Christmas. Although many of the events are held to raise money, we also believe them to be important in bringing our congregations together and encouraging the community into our buildings.

Communications

A small dedicated team produces '**The Candle in the Window**', a parish wide e-magazine. A local incumbent said that "he didn't know any parish that had such a good magazine". Most read it online, but some hard copies are made available, too. It offers a wonderful mix of theological discourse, news from the churches, book reviews, quizzes and more. Each church has its own **weekly newsletter** or **pew sheet**.

About six years ago, the parish took the decision to produce one **parish website**: <https://abingdonparish.org.uk> for all three churches. It has served its purpose but there is now the feeling that the website is due for further development.



Community engagement

In recent years the congregations of our three churches have been exploring ways in which to engage with the community outside of our congregations. These include:

The West Porch: staffed displays in St Helen's West porch at Christmas and Easter, when passers-by are invited to receive small seasonal treats and a leaflet giving service times. (See Appendix 1 for more detail)



The **St Nicolas South Porch**

hosts a Nativity Scene (visible when the church is shut) each December. In

2024 this was extended to a **Lent display** which week by week highlighted the themes of Lent and Holy Week. The congregation is considering the possibility of adding a **Pentecost Display** in 2025.

Cream Tea

St Michael & All Angels' Church,
Park Road



Cream Teas with Music

at St Michael and All Angels' from April to September have enticed many into the church on Saturdays, and made some money for the church as well.

Links and work with schools

We would love to develop and improve links with our local schools – perhaps interacting with both the religious education and history curricula.

Our Team Vicar is an Associate Governor of St Nicolas' VA Primary School, and a current member of the congregation at St Nicolas' Church is a Governor. The Team Vicar takes monthly Assemblies at the school, assists with end-of-term services (held in St Helen's, St Michael and All Angels', and Trinity Methodist / URC) and is available to provide pastoral support to the staff.

The parish supports the school by providing Scripture Union Books to year 6 and, through the St Nicolas' Education Trust, Bibles to all new pupils. Staff and Governors would welcome closer links with the parish, which is something the congregations, particularly at St Nicolas', would also like to grow. St Nicolas' School also maintains strong links with Christ Church in the neighbouring parish of North Abingdon.

As the largest church building in Abingdon, St Helen's is frequently used for school end-of-term and carol services. Four independent schools regularly bring their students to church, as does St Nicolas' school for its end of year service. St Michael and All Angels' is used by Abingdon School (an independent secondary) and St Nicolas' School.

Caldecott Primary School visits St Helen's regularly as part of their religious education curriculum. Year 7 pupils at Abingdon School visit the tomb of their founder and explore the building, and St Nicolas' School organises their own visits to St Nicolas' church.

Before the pandemic there were regular visits from John Mason School, a local state secondary, as part of their 'Charter Day'.



Organisation



The Governing Body (Trustees) for the parish is the PCC – composed of clergy, wardens, and elected representatives from the three congregations (See annual report at https://abingdonparish.org.uk/P_communications.html.) Financial and Governance (eg Safeguarding) responsibility rests with this body.

In addition each church has its own District Church Council, comprising ex-officio and elected members, which look after the day-to-day organisation of their church and congregation.

Finance

The three churches' day-to-day financial matters are managed separately, with the DCCs being responsible for income, expenditure and monitoring, budget preparation etc. The PCC provides strategic oversight and monitoring – receiving regular updates on the finances of each church and is the body responsible for approving budgets.

All major items of expenditure are discussed by the PCC which is also responsible for approving the consolidated end-of-year accounts. Each church is currently financially sound and the Parish Share is paid in full.

Further Responsibilities of the Team Rector

Trustee of The Friends of St Helen's

The Trustees meet once a year at the AGM and at other times as needed. A small committee organises events for members of the Friends of St Helen's. (See Appendix 1 for more detail).

Ex-Officio Governor of Christ's Hospital

Christ's Hospital of Abingdon <http://www.ch-of-abingdon.org/> is the oldest of Oxfordshire's charities (number 205112). Founded in 1553, it offers assistance to the people of Abingdon through the provision of Alms House accommodation, and grants to local organisations and individuals. Governors attend ten meetings per year (two to three hours, plus timely consideration of papers). There may be extraordinary events from time to time, such as Strategy Days, but the monthly meeting is the main focus.



Trustee of The Trust for the Development of St Helen's Church

Meeting once a year at the AGM, this Trust was set up when the church undertook a major reordering project around 25 years ago. It is used as a holding account for funds and as a 'non-religious' Trust when applying for grants for major projects.

Church in Abingdon

All Abingdon clergy are invited to participate in the governance and activities of the CiA. There are regular meetings (a chance to meet ecumenical partners in the town) and opportunities to get involved in other activities as each member is able. The CiA organises several joint events each year, often hosted by individual churches and led by CiA clergy.

Trustee of The St. Nicolas School Trust.

The St Nicolas School and Education Trust Abingdon (<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/5189383>) is a CIO established in 2022 to take over the assets and activities of an existing charity whose assets were held and managed by the Oxford Diocese as Custodian Trustees.



The objects of the new CIO are for the public benefit within the parish of Abingdon-on-Thames in the County and Diocese of Oxford:

- To advance education in such ways as the trustees shall from time to time think fit.*
- To advance the Christian faith in accordance with the beliefs and practices of the Church of England.*
- To further the objects and work of the Church of England in the said Parish in such ways as the trustees shall from time to time think fit.*

The Trustees of the Charity are: Ex-Officio – the Team Rector of the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames (Chairman), the Team Vicar and Church Wardens of St Nicolas plus up to three others - two approved by the AoT PCC and one nominated by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE).

Work to date has concentrated on setting up the CIO, and negotiations with the Charity Commission and Diocese over the transfer of funds, although progress has slowed since the retirement of the Team Rector.

The next steps – in which the Team Rector will play a vital role – are to determine how best to meet our charitable objectives, and to start to put them into practice for the benefit of the Abingdon community.

Civic role



As the historic parish Church of Abingdon-on-Thames, St Helen's plays its part in the civic life of the town.

The **Ceremony of Mayor-Making** is often held in the church and the Rector may be asked to act as the Mayor's Chaplain for a year.

The **Remembrance Day Service** is one of the largest in the year, attended by the Town Council, members of the British Legion, representatives of the army from Dalton Barracks and many uniformed organisations.

Following the service in church a short service takes place at the War Memorial in town, with the laying of wreaths. This is often led by the Rector and is very well attended.



Buildings

Please see the appendices for details of the buildings of each church.

The parish owns a residential house within walking distance of St Helen's (known as Enock House) which is currently occupied by our House for Duty priest.

There is a purpose-built Parish Centre, adjacent to the Rectory and close to St Helen's church. It contains the Parish Office and also a Hall with attached kitchen, suitable for up to 70 people; a room above this is laid out with easy chairs, a small kitchen area and two work stations and another small room can be used as an office or for small consultations. The building is used for children's activities during the main St Helen's Sunday service and for a lot of church meetings. Where possible it is let out at other times to produce an income. It has a small garden but no parking area.

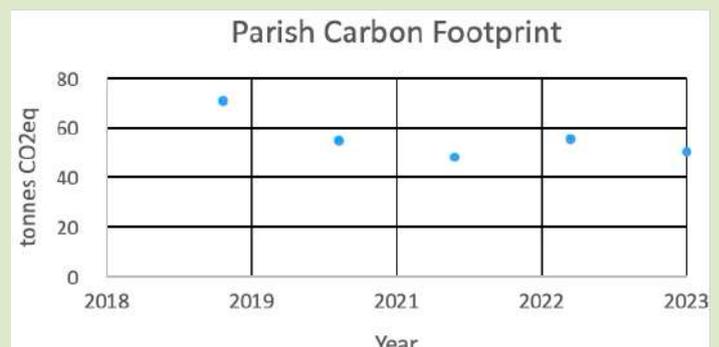
At St Michael and All Angels' there is a small church room with attached kitchen. It can be used or hired out separately from the church.

St Nicolas' has no separate church room, but a new annexe with fully accessible kitchen and toilet facilities has been created next to the entrance of the church as a multi-use space, for post-service refreshments, small meetings, and coffee mornings. The congregation of St Nicolas' is looking forward to developing the possibilities offered by these facilities.

Carbon footprint and eco-church

The parish is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and each church has registered with **A Rocha's Eco Church** programme. St Nicolas' church achieved an Eco Church Silver Award in 2024. The carbon footprint of each church has been published in the Parish Magazine for the past years.

A major consideration of the new lighting scheme in St Helen's is that it should be eco-friendly, using LED bulbs, and some of the congregation are looking into the feasibility of a water-source heat pump, drawing from the River Thames.



The Vicarage/Rectory



The Rectory lies in a very pleasant and quiet court of about 25 houses, in the heart of Abingdon and a stone's throw from St Helen's church. It has a linking door to the Parish Centre and was built with the intent of the room adjacent to the Centre being the Rector's office.

Downstairs there is a spacious lounge with an open fire and French doors leading on to the garden. Another smaller room could be used as a dining room or TV room. The kitchen is generous in size and is well fitted with units and the necessary plumbing for a washing machine and connections for a free standing gas cooker. There is a downstairs toilet.

Upstairs are four bedrooms and a family bathroom and toilet. The building is heated by gas central heating. The Diocese is intending to do some repair and improvement work to the property after the end of the current tenancy. They have already tendered for the cost of replacement triple glazing to all doors and windows.

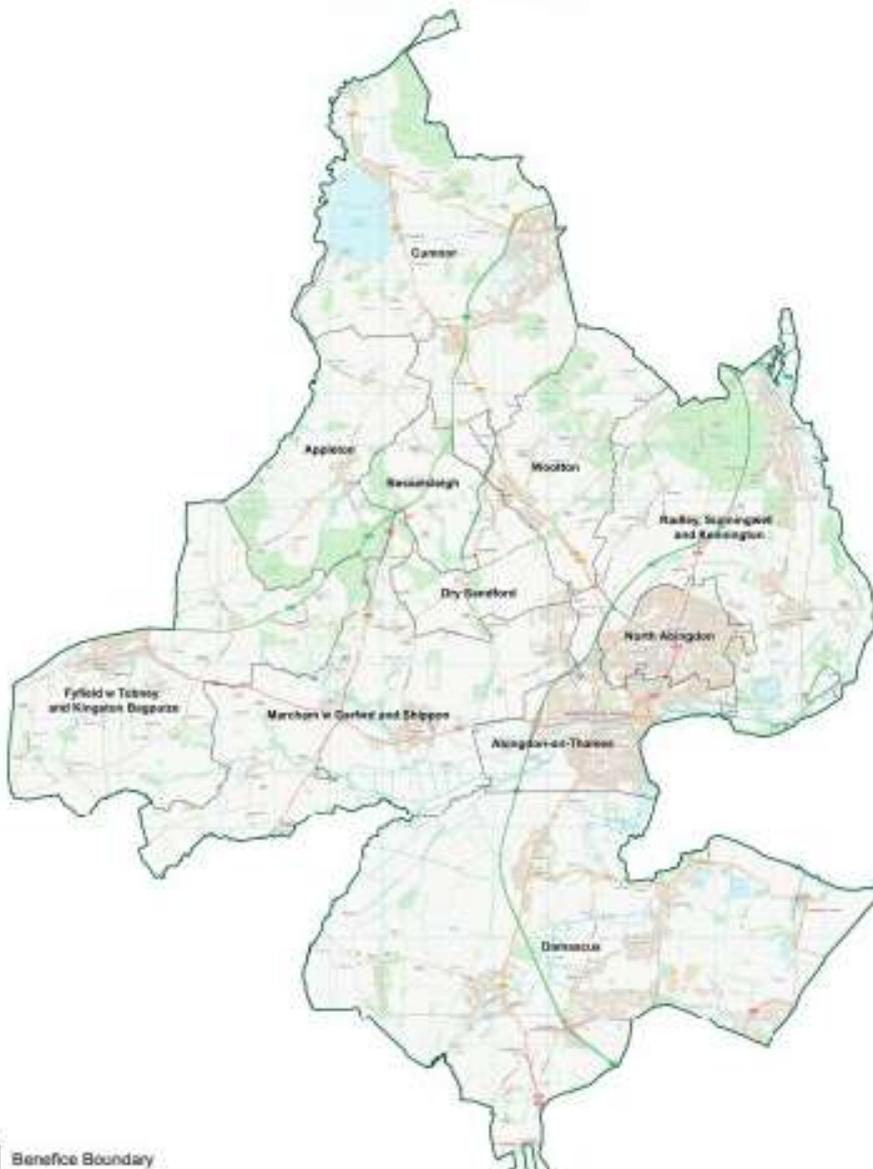
The south facing brick walled back garden is of moderate size with a mixture of flower beds, fruit trees and bushes and lawn. Outside the kitchen door is a large parking area and a small detached garage.

The Deanery Perspective

Welcome to Abingdon Deanery. The deanery is located south of Oxford and is part of the Diocese of Oxford. It is one of 11 deaneries within the Archdeaconry of Dorchester. We have a total of 10 benefices and 26 churches, a mixture of both large and small parishes in town, village, and rural contexts. The Clergy Chapter and Deanery Synod meet four times a year to support one another with prayer, and to share ideas and best practice.



Abingdon Deanery Overview by Benefice 2018



We are fortunate in that we as a Deanery can pay our Parish Share in full and so all Parishes benefit from a rebate from the Diocese. We have good communication across the Deanery and a good understanding of the missional priorities we share – not least being the intention of growing all-age congregations and continuing to develop effective outreach in all our communities. We aim to network both clergy and lay people in meeting these opportunities.

Sue Scott,
Lay Chair,
Abingdon Deanery



For more information, please see www.abingdondeanery.org.uk

The Diocesan Perspective



The Diocese of Oxford is the Church of England in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

The parish currently has two Lay Diocesan representatives out of a total Archdeaconry of Dorchester allocation of three laity.

The Common Vision Five Mission Focus Areas currently are:

1. Environmental action.
2. Setting discipleship and catechesis at the heart of our common life.
3. Growing new congregations.
4. Reaching out to children, schools, and families.
5. Addressing poverty and inequality.

- Together, we are the Church, called and sent by God as disciples of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are a living, growing network of more than a thousand congregations, chaplaincies, and schools.
- Together, we are called to be more Christ-like: to be the Church of the Beatitudes: contemplative, compassionate, and courageous for the sake of God's world.
- Together, we work with God and with others for the common good in every place in one of the great crossroads of the world.
- Together, we are called to proclaim the Christian faith afresh in this generation with joy and hope and love.
- Together, we are called to dream dreams and see visions of what could be, and see those visions come to birth.

Further information about the Diocese is available at www.oxford.anglican.org



Appendix 1



St Helen's Church <https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StH/StH.html>

A church has stood on this site by the Thames, witnessing to the Christian faith, for over a thousand years. The current church is unusual, being almost as wide as it is long. Its five aisles offer a beautiful and flexible space for all forms of worship and other community activities. The building accommodates a wide range of uses: from very large services attended by over 600 to intimate Taizé worship or a Wholeness and Healing Service.

Much of St Helen's Church today reflects the impact of the Oxford Movement in the late 19th century, with a Bodley altar in the Lady Chapel and reredos in the Chancel, but its greatest treasure must be the painted ceiling in the Lady Chapel completed in 1391, illustrating the lineage of Christ and culminating in Christ himself hanging on a cross of lilies.

About 25 years ago, a major re-ordering scheme began, installing under-floor heating, a nave altar platform and repositioning seating 'in the round'. This has transformed the life of the church, with increased visibility and a sense of inclusion and involvement in the services.

The re-ordering is still to be completed and we are launching a fundraising campaign to pay for a new, eco-friendly lighting scheme across the church. We are awaiting final permission from the DAC and have already been pledged a considerable sum of money. We have been assured that when the lighting is installed the church will remain open; we may only have to move from aisle to aisle for our Sunday services!

As one of the biggest spaces in Abingdon, the church is often used for concerts, art exhibitions, and other community activities, as well as for civic events, such as the Remembrance Sunday service.

Several local schools hold services in St Helen's throughout the year, and especially at Christmas.

St Helen's Church is open every day from Easter to September. It is rewarding to see how many people visit us during the day, be they locals, visitors, those who come to pray, to eat their lunch, or to play with the toys in the children's corner.

Worship at St Helen's: additional comments

The Eucharist is central to the life of our church community, and with the ministry of the word, it represents the focus of our Sunday morning worship. There is a history of great strength in preaching at St Helen's, where the congregation appreciates being challenged.

Music is strong at St Helen's with a robed choir of over 30 (joined by others for special events) and led by a Director of Music/Organist and an Assistant Organist. The choir is affiliated to the Royal Society of Church Music (RSCM) and young choristers are encouraged to take the various levels of singing awards. The church has a fine three manual Harrison & Harrison organ which has been completely restored.

The Sunday evening Services are different each week, including Taizé, a Service for Wholeness and Healing, Choral Evensong and occasionally a Sacred Concert. These services are often attended by those a little more on the sidelines of parish life.

The Friends of St Helen

The **Friends of St Helen** (FoSH) was set up to raise a capital sum of money to help care for the fabric of the church. It gives grants to support the maintenance of our church building. The Friends meet three or four times a year for a social evening and a cream tea each summer. Recent events have included a talk about life in the Caribbean and the archaeology of Abingdon. The Friends manage a small gift shop in the church, and recently produced a St Helen's calendar for sale.

Pastoral care

St Helen's congregation has an active pastoral care team supporting our members who are ill or in need of help in some way. The names of the sick and recently deceased are put on the weekly newsletter and are named during the intercessions at the Wednesday Eucharist.

Education and nurture

Children and families are welcome at the Sunday service, with a small play area in the church for the under threes, while older children can attend Junior Church, Quest or Senior Quest. The first Sunday Eucharist is tailored more to families and younger members of the congregation, with lessons and prayers frequently undertaken by young people. It is an occasion to welcome the newly baptised or to give thanks for the birth of a child.

Junior Church. At present we offer a Christian education and worship for those aged 3 to 8 on three Sundays a month following the Roots suggestions of activities and readings. At the end of the service they report back on what they have been doing and learning – often a highlight of the service!

For those aged c.8 to 14 there is a group called **Quest**. They, too, mostly follow the Roots material but will often have more discussion. The nature of their activities often reflects the age and interest of the children we have at that point in time. They also report back at the end of the service.

Senior Quest (aged c.14 upwards) meets once a month to discuss topics of ethical interest such as the recent debate about assisted dying or thoughts about where is God in the war between Israel and Palestine.

At the moment we have a team of seven leaders and another four helpers across the age groups, but we have fewer children and young people than we have had in previous years. Feedback from some of our young people has highlighted the value of Junior Church, Quest, and Senior Quest, and a priority for us is to develop such work.

Children are able to take communion before confirmation, with the agreement of their parents and after preparation. Children not receiving or not old enough to receive can be brought forward for a blessing.

***In our young people's words: "We need someone who makes young people a priority and tries to include them more in the life of the church, while staying true to the type of church we are and keeping older congregants engaged."
"We'd like a Rector who is 'inclusive, welcoming, flexible, open to different opinions, organised and prayerful."***

Charitable giving

Charitable giving is an integral part of the fabric and mission of St Helen's. We are currently supporting three charities with regular donations four times a year: **Abingdon Carousel** which provides services for children, parents and carers; the **Dorothy Springer Trust** which provides training in skills for the disabled in Sierra Leone and the **Open Doors Special Education Centre** in Nigeria, which caters for students with disabilities. A member of the congregation is (or was) closely linked to all of these charities.

In addition we support the local **Food Bank** both with donations and with volunteer help, **Macmillan Nurses** and, through our provision of the church building and services, the **British Legion** and the **Children's Society**.

Welcome and outreach

We have recently decided to keep the church open seven days a week. From Easter to September it is stewarded for two hours every weekday as well. Everyone feels this has been a wonderful step to take and it is not often that the church is empty, especially in summer, in the tourist season. There is a brief guide to the church and a welcome leaflet, both in hard copy in church and on the website, detailing what provision and activities are on offer to newcomers and explorers.

Those who wish to become involved in church life are invited to fill in a **welcome card** and they will then be contacted. At least annually a **Newcomers' Lunch** is held, offering an opportunity for those new to the church to meet and get to know those who have been around a while and to hear a little more about church life.

When the building was closed due to Covid-19, we initiated a church presence in the West Porch at Christmas and Easter. A **Nativity Scene** or **Easter Garden** is set up and leaflets of service times, children's activities and treats like mini-Easter eggs are offered to passersby, as well as a warm "Hello". The footfall past the church is large and many now expect to come and see our seasonal greeting. Numbers at all the Christmas services have certainly increased in recent years so we believe we are making an impact.



Hopes and Plans

In the immediate future we hope to install new lighting across the whole church and to complete the redecoration of the walls. Fund raising has started in a quiet way and we await the DAC's approval of the Faculty application. We expect to launch a public fund raising campaign in the summer.

St Helen's is at a pivotal point in its story. With the growth of Abingdon in the 1960s/70s there was an influx of young families who did much for the church. They are now in their 80s or above. Building on the valuable input of this generation, for whom we are now caring, we are nevertheless looking forward to the challenge of reaching out to many new congregants and their families, whom we hope will join us, bringing different skills and experiences. We are now eager to support a new Rector, who can both lead and work alongside us in moving the church forward into its next phase of ministry to the people of Abingdon.

Appendix 2

St Michael and All Angels' Church



<https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StM/StM.html>

St Michael and All Angels' church and St Nicolas' Church share the same Team Vicar, **Fr Paul Smith**.

The church is situated on Park Road, opposite Albert Park. It brings a distinctive Anglo-Catholic tradition to the parish. St Michael and All Angels' has a warm, friendly, and welcoming congregation, with an average attendance of between 30 to 40 people.

The Building

The building was designed by the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, and built in 1864-1867. It was dedicated by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce on 25th January 1867 and the church keeps this festival each year.

In 2009 the building underwent a significant re-ordering, including the installation of underfloor heating, a large labyrinth, and replacing its pews with chairs. There was a further enhancement in 2014 with the consecration of a nave altar, sensitively designed to be in keeping with the architecture of the building. In 2017 the church celebrated its 150th anniversary, by refurbishing its three bells, which are now in full use.

There is a distinctive set of Stations of the Cross on the walls, which are used for devotion, especially during Lent.

The church has a church room within the building with modern kitchen and toilet facilities. This offers a valuable space for meetings and other activities, especially hospitality. It is regularly hired out by community groups.

Worship

Labyrinth

Since its installation, there has been a great deal of interest in the Labyrinth from those outside the parish. Every month we host a group meeting for people who wish to walk the labyrinth after a moment of guided meditation. The Labyrinth is also the focus for a bi-monthly Circle Dancing group.

Sunday

Sung Mass is held at 9:30 am. The worship is centred on the celebration of the Mass (Common Worship, contemporary language) and incense and bells are used every Sunday. There is a small but very able choir which plays a valuable and much-appreciated role in our worship week by week.

Refreshments are served after the service each Sunday when members of the congregation have an opportunity to catch up and share fellowship.

Thursday (Tuesday in wintertime)

Said Mass is held at 12:30 pm. The midweek celebration of the Mass attracts a number of faithful communicants who stay for bring-your-own lunch. The average attendance is between eight and twelve people..

Pastoral Care

As a small congregation we are well aware of members of our church. We can, therefore, look out for each other and raise any concerns with the Vicar.

Education and nurture: Children's Mission

A very recent initiative has been the establishment of a once-monthly Children's Church which we hope to develop through the coming years. Mission to children and young families is an area we are keen to foster. We hold a crib service on Christmas Eve and a Good Friday service for children, which is followed by craft activities and hot cross buns!

Charitable Giving

Charitable giving is integral to our mission at St Michael and All Angels'. We support two charities during our Lent Appeal, when we ask the congregation to vote for their nominated charities to support over the next two years. This year's vote was for **The Abingdon Bridge**, a local charity providing guidance and emotional support for young people aged 13 – 25, and for **Tariro**, a charity supporting young people in Zimbabwe. We give a proportion of the money we receive to charities during the year. Additionally we support an Abingdon **Foodbank** and local charities at Harvest Festival and at our Christmas Fair.

Stewardship

Each year we run a Stewardship Campaign, in which we encourage our congregation to take part and pledge their giving over the following year.

Other activities

The building has the advantage of excellent acoustics and houses a beautiful Yamaha grand piano, which is used regularly for concert performances of a variety of genres, by visiting choirs and musical groups, all of which attract large and enthusiastic audiences. A local choir uses the church for practice and for performance.

Abingdon School (an independent school) uses the church during the year for services and occasional concerts.

We hold monthly cream teas with music in the spring and summertime which have proved popular with the congregation and the local community.

We have an annual Christmas Fair which is always a popular event.

Appendix III



St Nicolas' Church <https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StN/StN.html>

The Church of St Nicolas is one of the oldest buildings in Abingdon and one of the few remaining from the great Benedictine Abbey of Saint Mary. Started in about 1170, St Nicolas' served as a church for lay servants and tenants of the Abbey, and was situated on one side of the main gateway, complemented by St John's Hospital for lay people on the other.

The exterior of the church has changed little in recent centuries, but there were many internal changes as the result of a major restoration in 1880 and repairs to the chancel after a serious fire in 1953. Small re-orderings have continued, resulting in a church with a moveable nave Altar, fixed pew seating in about two-thirds of the nave, and an open area at the west end which offers space for additional seating for larger services and concerts, for refreshments and hospitality after services, and for meetings and exhibitions. We have installed automatic doors with glass panels so the Altar can be seen from the street, and ramps in the nave and crossing, making the main body of the church fully accessible. A re-design of the annexe has created equal access toilet facilities and a small kitchenette.

We have a wonderful central location right on Abingdon Market Place. The District Church Council and congregation are ready to capitalise on the many ministry possibilities opened up by the new facilities.

Inside the church is the memorial to John Blacknall and his wife Jane, who died of the plague on the same day: 21st August 1625. It is being restored to mark their 400th anniversary. His bequest still provides for much of the structural upkeep of the building, still in good repair. The Tower houses a peal of six bells cast by Abel Rudhall of Gloucester in 1741. Bells are rung each Sunday and the ringers can be seen from outside the church, and passers-by sometimes come in to watch them ring.

A memorial tablet outside the church commemorates St. Edmund of Abingdon (born 1174), Archbishop of Canterbury from 1234-1240, who we believe may have worshipped in St Nicolas'. His mother's tomb was originally housed here.

The small garden to the North of the Church is well managed and is much used by visitors, providing a green refuge in the very centre of the town.

Worship

St Nicolas' is central in church tradition and has a small friendly congregation, drawn from a variety of backgrounds, with typically 25 to 30 adults and occasionally some children at the 11:15am service.



Services follow a fixed but varied pattern of **Prayer Book Morning Prayer**, with sung canticles (first Sunday); **Common Worship Communion** (second, fourth and fifth) and an informal **Service of the Word** (third Sunday). This service is often lay-led, and normally theme-based, ranging from biblical themes to church teaching or spirituality. It gives the opportunity for the congregation to engage with teaching, with the 'sermon-slot' being interactive and given over to small group discussion and feedback on the theme of the day. Most congregation members attend all styles of service, but some choose to come to only one or another.

The church has a good two-manual Nicholson organ, and a baby grand piano. Both are used regularly in services. A small group of singers lead the singing, enthusiastically supported by the congregation. The hymnody is mainly traditional, but more modern music has also been introduced, particularly on Third Sundays.

All services are broadcast live via Zoom, and sermons are made available as audio recordings on the website. Toys and activities are always available for younger members.

St Nicolas' hosts the Church in Abingdon series of **Weekday Prayers** in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity most years, and is pleased to be able to host Mothers' Union and other occasional services.

We offer monthly services of **Communion by Extension** to two local care homes, one held in church (after which we offer refreshments in the open space at the west end) and the other in the care home. Care home residents occasionally join us for Sunday services.

Pastoral care

As a smaller congregation most members are well-known to everyone. We all look out for each other, and a Pastoral Assistant is available to help with particular concerns. A cross-church House Group, led by a member of St Nicolas' congregation, meets every fortnight in church or members' homes throughout the year.

Charitable Giving

Every year we designate all collections on specific Sundays to external charities. In 2024 we supported charities working with homeless people (spring), dementia sufferers (summer), famine or hunger relief (harvest) and children's work (Christmas).



Hopes and plans

St Nicolas' position on the Market Place makes it the most conspicuous church in Abingdon's historic town centre and confers a very particular responsibility for outreach. We would also like to build on our heritage links with Abingdon Abbey and St Edmund of Abingdon and are in touch with others in the town who are similarly interested.

Our glass-fronted South Porch offers an opportunity to display a Nativity scene at Christmas, and last year we displayed a changing Lenten Cross, highlighting the themes of Lent and Holy Week. Both tableaux attracted considerable interest from many passers-by, and we plan to repeat and develop these initiatives as a means of Christian outreach.

Our small size is both a restriction and an asset; we have fewer people able to share the work, but we can be responsive, quickly canvassing congregation opinions and taking up opportunities. We look forward to the future and the possibilities which a new Rector might explore with us.

