



THE PARISH OF COWPEN, SAINT BENEDICT

PARISH PROFILE







■ Re-igniting faith in Cowpen



OVERVIEW

Welcome to The Parish of Cowpen, Saint Benedict.
Thank you for opening yourself up to God's calling, we hope that you may discern that he is leading you to serve our people and grow new disciples in this place.

We are a church family that has endured a lengthy vacancy and overcome past challenges. We have done so by striving to maintain the unity of that family and through our faithfulness. Our tenacity and determination to bring the love of God into the lives of the people of this parish, gives us a hopeful and positive outlook.

We have celebrated the highs and endured the lows, so we must acknowledge that some of the current statistical information can appear to make difficult reading, however much of this is borne out of the vacancy and we hope that you will be able to see what we see...enormous potential.

We have some great components to work with, we just need someone who can be the petrol to our fire. We want to re-ignite this Parish, to show God's love, to bring hope to those who have none and re-establish ourselves as the heart of the community.



This profile has been written by the PCC in consultation with various stakeholders throughout October and November 2023



OUR CHURCH



SERVING



JESUS



TODAY

THE PARISH CHURCH



The present church building replaced the old S. Catherine's mission church, located on Cowpen Road. The then Vicar of Horton wanted to root the church in the centre of the newly planned social housing development. A generous plot in between Devonworth Place and Brierley Road was purchased, it was highly visible as at the time as Devonworth Place was a circular development with an open green in the centre. This was later built upon in the 1970's. The first phase commenced with the building of a multi-purpose church and hall. It had metal chairs and a screen to close off the sanctuary.

The curved glu-lam beams give the impression of an upturned boat. The church building was planned to be adjacent to Brierley Road and the new Vicarage at the top of the land adjoining Devonworth Place. Sadly, funds prevented the church from being built and the vicarage now sits where the church meant to be. In the 1980's a hall was added and the combined church/hall became the church only.

At this time old pews were imported from various sources. The buildings have been improved but remain architecturally unappealing. The PCC has discussed ways in which we can uplift the grounds in order to create a sense of place. The old bell from S. Catherine's was buried under new bungalows that were built on the site. S. Benedict's never got a bell, so it remains a goal to somehow incorporate one in the future.

Strangely, we may now be one of the few churches in the country who can boast having a solid oak sprung dance floor!

THE PARISH CHURCH



Internal decoration has taken place recently and the PCC has passed a resolution to move forward with a faculty application to remove the pews as many are broken and are becoming dangerous. We are considering either chairs or stackable pews to allow us flexibility, particularly at Weddings and Baptisms and to allow easy access for wheelchairs or prams.

The Church benefits from some beautiful adornments such as excellent quality statues and Stations of the Cross by Messrs. Stuflesser of Austria/Italy.

The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a veiled tabernacle. We are blessed to have an inventory of copes, vestments, dalmatics, silver, and metalware that allow us to celebrate the seasons of the church well.

The church was re-wired approx. 12 years ago and features a superior quality commercial lighting system with dimming facilities that allow for seven pre-set lighting scenes and manual adjustment.

The organ was installed in 2008 by Phoenix Organs. It is digital, having a detached console and a high-quality external speaker system located above the entrance door, all contained within an oak case manufactured by Renatus of Devon.

HOW WE DESCRIBE OURSELVES



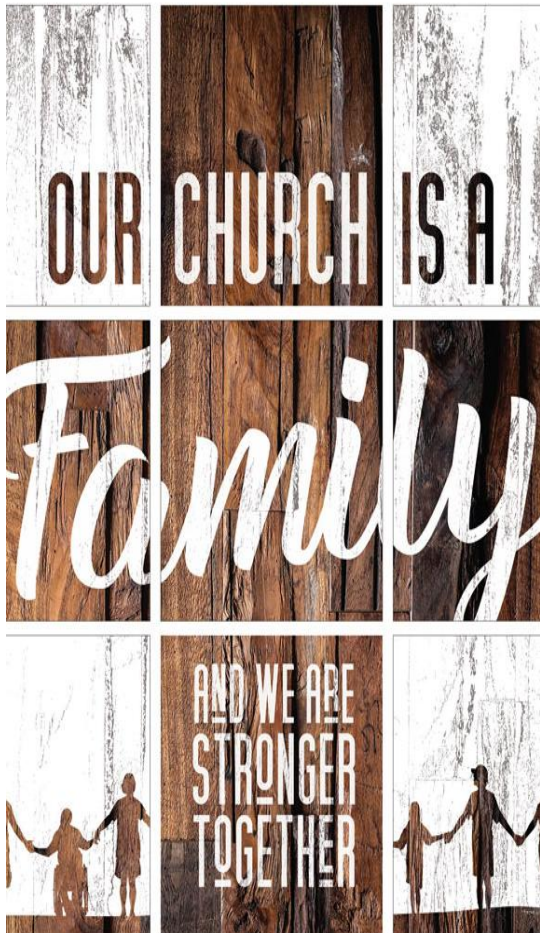
We are a friendly and outgoing bunch. Although our average age is much higher than we would like it to be, there is a young outlook within older heads. We have a small and extremely hardworking team that ensure we observe the seasons of the church in a way that gives glory to God.

We remember with fondness the days of 40-50 people in church, a full sung Mass setting (actually, "settings" is more accurate, as we had different ones for different seasons), as today we only have a said mass with hymns.

We hope to get back to mixing old favourites with modern worship songs to enliven and enrich our worship.

We are determined to re-grow our place in this community and on entering the church, many people comment upon how lovely it is, along with those who reminisce about being part of the serving team, taking part in church events when they were young or wandering around Cowpen in a "full works" procession on The Feast of Corpus Christi!

MORE ABOUT US



In past years, we have enjoyed the fellowship that Pilgrimage brings, particularly to Walsingham but also to other sacred places e.g. Alnmouth Friary with the brothers of SSF. We would like to re-develop this aspect of church family life.

We no longer have a Sunday School as there are no regular children attending church. This also means that we have not been able to attend the Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage, a much-loved yearly event. Re-engagement with our schools and community may allow us to move forward in these areas – The PCC has previously considered sponsoring youngsters who may be interested in and benefit from, the Youth Pilgrimage experience.



In order to maintain unity, S. Benedict has Episcopal oversight from the Bishop of Beverley. That said, we have remained and wish to continue to remain, in good standing with the Diocese of Newcastle and The Bishop of Newcastle, who is the Patron.

We are rooted in the Catholic Anglican tradition but are welcoming and respectful to all.

Throughout the ebb and flow of the past years, we have remained loyal and faithful.

OUR FACILITIES: THE PARISH HALL



As previously mentioned, the parish hall is a 1980's addition. A simple rectangular design with high level windows. As there were no community facilities at the time, it was fitted with a sports floor but is no longer used for such activities as other specialist venues have been built.

The hall has recently been redecorated and is currently let Mon – Fri by a childcare facility called Dinotots. It is hoped that a future project will allow us to open the hall to the Parish Garden, offering a view over it and a route out.

The hall is supported by toilet facilities and a modern kitchen which all flow off a central foyer. There is a loop hearing system, a good quality sound system, level access through from the car park and accessible doors.

OUR FACILITIES: THE PARISH GARDEN

The Parish Garden was created as a community garden, to be enjoyed by all parishioners. It has dedicated areas, seating zones and a summer house. The metal design work was undertaken by a specialist metal worker who also worked with local schools.

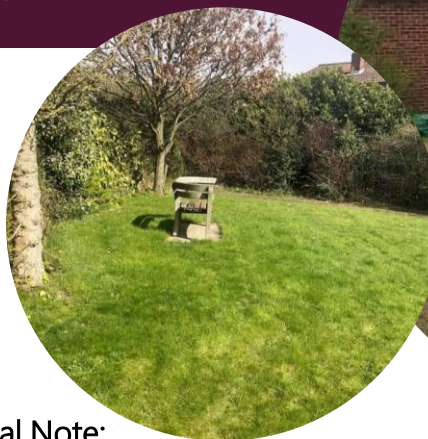
A gravelled area along the side of the church and hall was left to allow for future development, it is hoped that we will be able to create the planned paved area and be able to access the garden from the hall in future.

There was a period of time when the garden was untended and again during Covid. We have now tamed it and want to develop the planting this coming year, opening it daily and using it for outdoor events.

We have two car parks, one that is accessed from Brierley Road (a main through road) and the other accessed via Devonworth Place.

General Note:

At one time this church had vandalite windows and barbed wire on the flat roof. Rather than being a deterrent, it was seen as challenge to a small number of youths with nothing better to occupy their lives, a sad reflection of the times. At the time of a major renovation, installation of new windows, a new roof and creation of the Parish Garden, all those so-called deterrents were removed, vastly improving the exterior. The idea was to show the improvement and to ensure we maintained it. Whilst there have been some minor bits of vandalism, we have sent a clear message, that whatever is damaged will be re-instated as quickly as possible. We are also working towards the further development of the grounds to create a real sense of place. All kinds of people walk through the grounds every day and we want to create a place that feels special to them. Who knows, we may even get to a point where the church can be open during the day too!



OUR WORSHIP



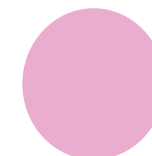
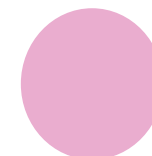
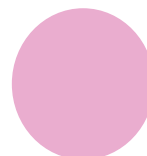
SUNDAY MASS AT 3P.M.

(This was formerly 10am and changed to enable clergy cover during the vacancy. A review is needed)

Common Worship liturgy with seasonal variations, the usual readings, said Responsorial Psalm and Homily. We currently sing three hymns with music played during communion. In previous years we have benefitted from guest preachers in the form of Bishops, Clergy, and those from the religious life. The service lasts approx. 45-50 mins and is followed by a time of fellowship around chat, a cuppa, and treats.

WEDNESDAY AT 10P.M.

A quiet and reflective Mass with a duration of around 30mins.



RECENT EASTER EVENTS



In the lead up to Easter this year we had 80 children from Horton Grange Primary in church to learn more about Holy Week and Easter. We were helped by clergy and laity from Newsham in this project, as well as members of our congregation and one of the visiting clergy. There is clearly a desire from Horton Grange to repeat this and we sense a good opportunity for a developing link. Also, one of our visiting clergy did a session with the 1yr olds from Dinotots - who meet in our hall - around the Easter story, again helped by members of the congregation. This built on a Christingle event last Christmas and there appear to be good opportunities to develop that relationship in the coming months. On Easter Day we celebrate the Risen Christ, with a wonderful Baptism, for a Covid baby, who is part of new family to join us, along with two new Ukranian friends.

OUR WORSHIP

DAILY & OCCASIONAL SERVICES:

As noted elsewhere, we would like to see the daily rhythm of the church re-established as we grow. The offices of Morning and Evening prayer were previously said in church and open to all. Sometimes attended by 3 or 4, sometimes with just the Priest. We think it is important to have this public prayer life and there may be an opportunity to engage with community, initially by means of prayer requests or a prayer board.



We offered a social media version of this during covid, which proved there is a need, the help of a new Priest in developing this will be invaluable. Leading from this may also come the re-introduction of the Healing Mass with the Laying on of Hands. During Lent we have previously held either a Lent course or weekly Stations of the Cross leading up to the Triduum.



We are open trying out new ideas or re-imagining the things we know that may not work as well as they once did.

CHURCH LIFE



COFFEE & CHAT: 1ST SATURDAY OF THE MONTH

Open to the community, we are currently looking at re-advertising this more broadly.

BINGO: LAST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH

Open to all – as above

FETE'S

No set date's, arranged around seasons. The PCC has reflected on the need for a combined advertising strategy, using digital platforms alongside signage and leaflets in order to maximise the opportunity for community engagement.

OTHER

Church has been opened to light candles & pray. E.g. Tragic local deaths, the death of Her late Majesty the Queen.



OTHER

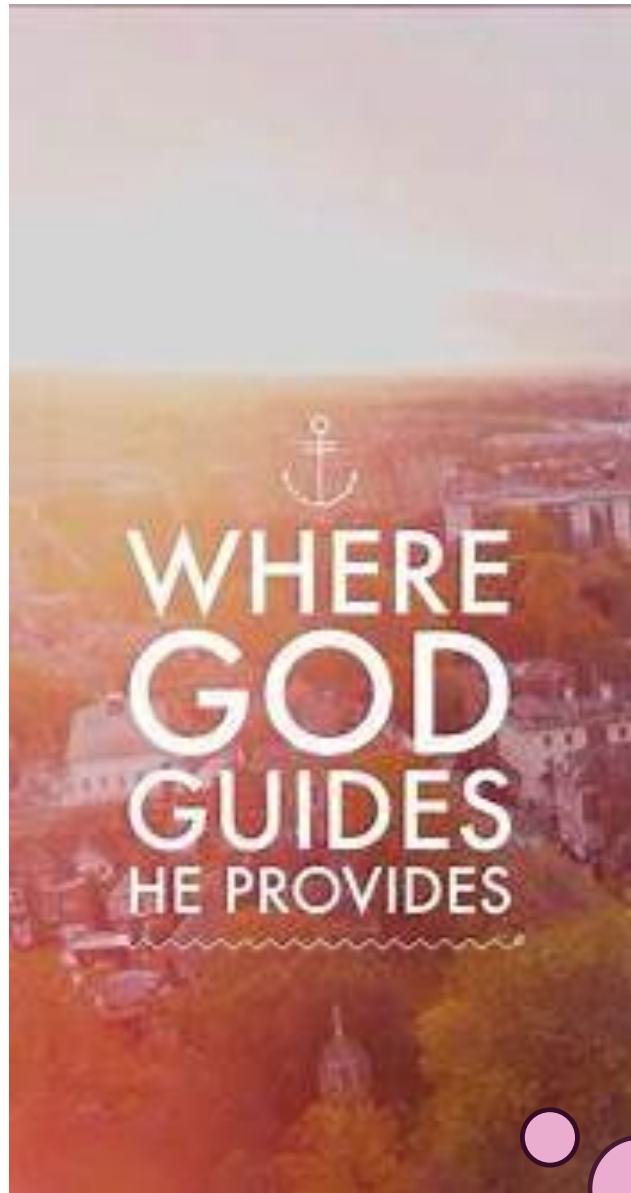
All Souls: We have in previous years observed All Souls Day and held a separate non-Eucharistic service for those have been bereaved, usually on the closest sunday evening.

The decrease in church funerals or those attended by a Priest, combined with the vacancy has meant that we have been unable to do this. We would very much like to grow this ministry, hopefully to the point of having bereavement volunteers.

SOUP & SANDWICH

We have provided light meals for the community and those from Age Concern and Thornton Drive Specialist Care. This stopped during Covid and has not re-started, for various reasons. We would like to do this once more as we start to grow again.

We have also had ad-hoc or seasonal events, such as Fish and Chips, Pancakes etc and the occasional day trip. E.g. to Holy Island.



WHERE WE MIGHT BE IN 3 YEARS

The new Priest firmly established within the community as a trusted and valued minister and friend.

Connections providing opportunities that show demonstrable growth.

A numerical increase in attendance.

Home Communions and Care Home Ministry fully engaged.

Better representation across age groups.

A re-start in engagement with young people.

Introduction of Messy Church.

A return of funerals and baptisms in church.

Growth in church weddings.

Church services and general life of the church expanded.

Valued by the community.





OUR PARISH



A BRIEF HISTORY

The area was originally noted for farmland, salt pans & mills. Cowpen was a relatively prosperous village with several mansion houses, mills, farms, and a square built for employees, a smaller version of some of the model villages that were being built in industrial heartlands throughout the country. As mining took a foothold and riverside industry grew, the Port of Byth developed with the aid of the railways.

The landscape started to change dramatically. Before the creation of the spine road connecting the coastal towns of South East Northumberland, there were two ferries to take carry people back and forth to North Blyth, located over the water. One such ferry, the "high ferry", was located within the Parish. Farmland was compulsorily purchased for the building of mass housing between the early 1950's – 1960's.

A "Leech" estate was then added in the 1970's off Tynedale Drive within Cowpen Estate. The Industrial estate has steadily grown over the years and a small retail park was built on Cowpen Road in the late 1980's. In the past 10 years another flurry of house building has seen new estates built in a distinct area to the west of Blyth Academy (Built c.2000).

These new houses are very much commuter estates and see themselves as distinct from the housing in nearby Kitty Brewster and Cowpen Estate. The official parish name does cause issue at times as in the main, residents of the new estates do not regard themselves as residents of Cowpen.

The PCC has discussed the potential of a "friendly name" for the Parish to promote a sense of belonging for all. The last mansion house, Cowpen Hall, was demolished in the late 70's and where it once stood proud, now stands the golden arches of McDonalds!

Some would say, many quality features and street scenes of the area were swept away in a wave of house building that offered hope for a better future, whether that was fulfilled or not is a matter of debate.



THE PARISH TODAY

The Parish lies at the north western gateway into Blyth Town and Port of Blyth. The northern boundary is defined by the river Blyth, the western boundary by the Spine Road connecting the south east Northumberland towns.

As mentioned above, a mix of housing, social and private, a diverse range of styles, Cowpen Estate being a standard 1950's red brick development with a "Leech" infill development from the 1970's. The then Blyth Valley Council, removed a lot of trees from within the estate, so in places it can feel like a harsh environment, with some small areas of relief. New Estates have a more contemporary feel. The key areas of the parish are Cowpen Estate (1950 – 1960), The Leech's Estate (1970's), Kitty Brewster Estate (1960's). Chase Farm (1990's), Horton Grange (early 2005 - 2010) & Crofton Grange (2015 – 2023).

Have and have not's.

A post-industrial back drop to many living within Cowpen Estate provides challenging lives, lack of aspiration and opportunity. Cowpen Estate has the types of challenges associated with many urban estates.

The newer developments have a mix of residents, some are affluent and some appear affluent, we say that because there are what is termed "working poor" here too, especially in the context of the cost of living increases seen in recent years and higher interest rates.



BUSINESSES



On the Riverside, there is a large Industrial and Enterprise Park, housing a variety of businesses from engineering, manufacturing, service and general commercial. We have a small retail park anchored by Homebase. In the past, chaplaincy services have been offered to the park. Our new Priest will need to discern whether that can be offered in the short/medium/long term.

SUPERMARKETS & SHOPPING



There are two main supermarkets in the Parish, Aldi on Cowpen Road and a large Asda at the north western gateway into Blyth. We also have a range of fast food outlets adjacent to the main road, such as McDonalds, KFC and Greggs. Dotted throughout the Parish are a range of everyday shops, takeaways, and small retail businesses.

SCHOOLS



We have a range of Schools within the Parish. Horton Grange Primary School (Ages 2-11 yrs.) and The Blyth Academy (Ages 11 – 18yrs). The Dales School, sits next to Horton Grange Primary and provides for pupils aged 4 – 11yrs with specialist educational needs.

RESIDENTIAL HOMES, CARE HOMES & SUPPORTED LIVING



Our near neighbour, adjacent to the church is Belford Court, owned by Anchor Hanover Group, providing independent living for those aged 55+. Blythgate Manor, Tynedale House & South Bebside are all substantial Care Homes, located in relative proximity to each other. Thorntree Assisted living, have two bungalows in one of the newer developments, proving those with aged 65+ who need specialist care.

HOSPITALS, DOCTOR & DENTIST



We do not have a Doctor's surgery within the Parish, but we do have a dentist! The medical groups for Blyth are located outside of the Parish, with one being located within the Community Hospital, located off the town centre. On the outskirts of Cramlington is a Specialist Emergency Care Hospital, located some 7 minutes away by car. We are fortunate to have world class hospitals in Newcastle, the Freeman Hospital is home to a regional Cardiothoracic Centre and Institute of Transplantation. It houses the Northern Centre for Cancer Care and The Sir Bobby Robson Cancer Trials Research Centre. The Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) specialises in Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Burns, Infectious Diseases, Maternity, Neurosciences and contains a Childrens Hospital.

OTHER DENOMINATIONS



The Roman Catholic Church of S. Cuthbert is located on Cowpen Road and the R.C. church of S. Wilfrid in the centre of Blyth Town. Cowpen Methodist Church is located on Briardale Road, Cowpen and the Central Methodist Church is located in the central area of Blyth Town.

OTHER INFORMATION



The **Empire School of Boxing** helps to channel the energy of youngsters and adults, teaching them discipline and teamwork. There is also a large **Territorial Army Centre** on the Eastern edge of the Parish, adjacent to **Blyth Crematorium**.

The Parish boundary is delineated in such a way as to put the Crematorium within the boundary of the adjoining Parish of Saint Mary Blyth. **Briardale House** is located on Briardale Road, next to the Methodist Church and is a Community Hub operated by Hadston House, who also provide a community hub in Hadston further up the coast. We even have **Hells Angels Regional Motorbike Club**, at the old Age Concern hut!



The train now arriving....

A **major rail infrastructure program** is underway to connect the South East Northumberland Towns of Ashington, Bedlington and Blyth to the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. The line exists but the passenger services were closed as part of the Beeching cuts and will re-open in phases over the next couple of years.

This **will have an enormous impact** on travel, as commuters must go into Newcastle by car or spend an hour or more on the bus. Blyth will have **two new stations**, one at Newsham (south side of Blyth), due to open in 2024 and **one at Bebside** (on the other side of the spine road to Asda) with work underway now. The later will **particularly benefit the people of our Parish**.

BLYTH TOWN



Blyth town centre is undergoing a regeneration of the Market Place area, in addition the old Keel Row Shopping Centre is being demolished and a new cinema with culture hub is to be built. The quayside has benefitted in previous years from investment, with a new hotel, town houses and business hubs overlooking the river.

The town is home to **Catapult**, a green energy research and development hub and a new energy central learning hub for green technologies is under construction.



There are a range of artisan cafes springing up and to the south of the town, you will find a wonderful beach front area, complete with colourful beach huts, caf  s, a very popular fish and chip shop, also servicing delicious ice cream and a new Bistro.

Also on the beach is **Blyth Battery**, a WW 1 & 2 big gun installation which is maintained and preserved by an enthusiastic group of volunteers. They often hold events which including dances complete with war time attire.



FURTHER AFIELD



The City of Newcastle is interesting on many levels, historically, architecturally, and culturally. It is buzzing with energy. It is home to the Cathedral Church of the Diocese, which has undergone a recent re-ordering and development programme.

Travellers can board the train north or south from Newcastle Central Station or take a Metro to various locations including Newcastle International Airport, if you intend to take a break in sunnier climes.



If you're looking to do something on a day off, the stunning North Northumberland Coast is a relatively short journey away. The expansive beach at Druridge Bay is but 25 mins away.

Going further north, the port of Amble and then Alnmouth village. Onward take you to the Boulmer, Craster, Newton, Beadnell, Seahouses and Bamburgh.

If it's a sunny day, you could take a trip to the Farne Islands and take a look inside the Longstone Lighthouse or the Chapel on Inner Farne, where Saint Cuthbert lived in solitude. There are many castles and places to explore.



SOME STATISTICS

Parish population @ 2018	6944
Since 2018 400+ houses have been built, so this will be higher	
Parish Area (Square miles)	1.0
% aged 0-4	6.4
% aged 5-17	17.7
% aged 18-29	15
% aged 30-44	19.2
% aged 45-64	25.7
% aged 65 and over	16.2
% White ethnicity	98.3
% Asian ethnicity	1.05
% Black ethnicity	0.0
% Mixed ethnicity	0.5
% Other ethnicity	0.1
% Christian	61.6
% Buddhist	0.1
% Hindu	0.0
% Jewish	0.0
% Muslim	0.5
% Sikh	0.3
% Other religion	0.3
% No religion	30.7
% Religion not stated	6.5

Deprivation Index Ranking: 391 out of 12,307 (1= most deprived & 12,307 = least deprived)



MORE STATISTICS

Number on Electoral Roll	21
Average Sunday Attendance	9
Average Sunday Communicants	9
Average Weekday Attendance	6
Average Weekday Communicants	5
Number of Baptism in the past 12 months	5
Number of people confirmed in the past 12 months	0
Number of weddings in the past 12 months	3
Number of funerals in church in the past 12 months	1
Number of funerals taken by clergy not in church in the last 12 months	8



OUR FINANCES



For a small Parish Church in a deprived area, our current financial position is healthy enough to be able to pay our Parish Share, pay our bills and maintain the building.

It will also let us move forward with plans for future proofing some maintenance items and provide the basis upon which we can apply for grant funding for medium to long term projects.

The PCC has discussed investing in good publicity in the future to help support our goals. We still need to fund raise and we will need to look at giving as we grow, the current congregation do give what they can, both directly and indirectly.

A full set of parish accounts will be made available to interview candidates.



STRENGTHS:

Determination – Can do!

Loyalty

Unity

Faithfulness

Hopeful for a bright future

Flexibility – we'll give anything a go!

Adaptability – if it doesn't work, let's tweak it and try again!

WEAKNESSES

Ageing congregation

A need for further spiritual growth

A lack of diversity

No young people

Not visible enough

OPPORTUNITIES:

There is still a latent respect for the church and clergy

Untapped potential

Engagement with undertakers re: funerals

Promotion of Baptisms and Weddings

Engagement with schools

Dinotots Childcare (Hall)

THREATS:

Indifference in the community

Ageing congregation

Lack of religious education within the Parish

Growth of secularism by default – especially in baptisms and funerals

Peer pressure

S.W.A.T.

THE VICARAGE

The Vicarage is a 1980's build, four bedroomed detached house, light, airy and of generous proportions, set centrally within garden grounds.

The house comprises: an entrance porch with a door leading into the large study, providing a room separate to the main house for work or meeting purposes. A further lockable door leads into the main hall with a w/c off and access to the breakfasting kitchen, dining room and living room.

The living room is located to the rear of the house and over looks the rear and side gardens. Access can be gained to the side garden from the living room via patio doors. From the kitchen there is access to the utility room and from there an external door to the rear garden with a further door to the garage.

Upstairs there are four bedrooms, a family bathroom, a separate w/c and large under eaves storage cupboard. Externally there is a gated entry from the road and a block paved drive allowing access to the garage and parking for additional vehicles.

The gardens are fenced, with the front separated from the rear with gated access. The gardens wrap around the entire house with the general orientation being south to the front and west to the side elevation where the living room is located.

We feel the vicarage will make an excellent home, it is adjacent to the church and benefits from that central and visible location.



PERSON SPECIFICATION & CHALLENGE

THE PRIEST WE ARE LOOKING FOR

- Please refer to the Person Specification.

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE AS WE SEE IT



As the parish has had no day-to-day visible priestly presence for a considerable number of years, we believe it is of the utmost priority that the new Parish Priest should be hands on, stomping the pavement, meeting people and introducing himself. Going to the places where people will be doing their everyday business so that he deliberately runs into folk and starts to build relationships.

Formal introductions to Local Dignitaries, Councillors, Head Teachers etc can be organised and then those opportunities should be developed.

In conjunction with the PCC, a plan to identify “quick wins” and first year goals should be created, monitored and adapted as required.

We hope our new Priest will be something of a liturgical mixologist, producing awesome liturgy and inspiring homilies, communicating a message of positivity to the existing congregation and celebrating success when it comes, in whatever form it appears.

Incrementally building and reaching further into the community, especially to the new estates where we have been unable to realise any contact.

FINAL THOUGHTS

■ We thank you for taking the time to read our Parish Profile and Person Specification, we hope that we have been able to give you something of the flavour of this place.

■ It is difficult to know how much or little to provide, we can only pray that the information you have read will sit with you as you pray about the direction in which God wants to lead you, where he wants you to make a difference.

■ We hope the place he wants to lead you to is here, or at the very least to an application.

■ For now, our love and prayers go with you on the journey.

