



BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Volland



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Words of Welcome to Church of England, Birmingham

Thank you for showing an interest in the post of Vicar of Highgate, St Alban and St Patrick.

This is an exciting time for Church of England Birmingham, as we seek to share the good news of Jesus in the West Midlands and pursue our vision of a *Transforming Church* in order to see *growing churches at the heart of each community*.



To give some context to our city and region, Birmingham is the UK's second city, is super-diverse, and has the youngest urban population in one of the most lively, diverse and creative city regions. As a diocese, Church of England Birmingham (CofEB) was founded in 1905, is geographically small but densely populated, covering an area of nearly 300 square miles and includes parishes in Birmingham and parts of Solihull, Sandwell, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, and often to people's surprise, our rural parish communities make up 15% of our family.

Birmingham is the 'poorest' CofE diocese (based on IMD rankings) but also one of the most generous (based on giving as % of income). We are recognised for being innovative, making good use of scarce resources, which resonates with the character of Birmingham being known as the 'city of a thousand trades'.

Churches in our Diocese embrace a wide spectrum of traditions from evangelical and Catholic, liberal to conservative and choral to charismatic in their outlook on mission and ministry. I am committed to ensuring that all can find a home, and flourish alongside lay and ordained colleagues within Church of England Birmingham.

Finally, thank you for showing interest in this post, and I hope the profile provides all the information you need. Be assured of my prayers as you discern whether this might be the role and region to which God is calling you. Please pray for Church of England Birmingham as we seek to witness to Christ and see lives, families and communities transformed by the power of the Spirit and to the glory of God.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Volland
Bishop of Birmingham



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
BIRMINGHAM



Parochial Church Council of Saint Alban and Saint Patrick Highgate, Birmingham

PARISH STATEMENT

Adopted unanimously at a Section 11 Meeting of the PCC on the 11th of May 2025

In 1865 the committee seeking to start St Alban's Mission District in Highgate wrote to James Pollock, then a curate in London, explaining the object of the mission and the intended work, ending with these words. "We have no Church to offer you, no mission room, no schools, no vicarage, no stipend, nothing but wickedness and work. Will you come?" Mr Pollock was at Breakfast when the letter arrived, he opened and read it, and left his Breakfast unfinished, and went straight to his Vicar and said, "I have a call from God will you let me go?" His Vicar remonstrated, argued and implored; told him it was an impossible task for him to undertake. He was deaf to entreaty, to argument, and to everything, he only kept on saying "It is a call from God, He has spoken. I must go; will you spare me as soon as you can?" And his Vicar did, and he came to Birmingham to begin his work very soon after.

Our Vision for the New Incumbent at St Alban's

It is our prayer that our new incumbent will be grounded in Anglo-Catholic spiritual tradition and would welcome working in a diverse inner-city parish and the challenge of broadening the impact of St Alban's church on the life of Highgate. Living in the vicarage, our new vicar should be happy to be seen around the Highgate community as the public face of St Alban's. This has particular importance as few of the present congregation live in the parish. Our vicar should maintain strong links with Stanhope Wellbeing Hub as well as with St Alban's Academy.

We are mindful of the past sharing of the parish post with chaplaincy at Ark St Alban's Academy and that significant involvement at the Academy is expected of the new incumbent. The requirements relating to the Academy are not the remit of the PCC, but we believe that, while work at the Academy continues the historic role of our parish in education and has a role to play in inter-faith relations, work in the parish and wider neighbourhood has greater potential for fruitful Christian mission.

Our new vicar should strengthen ties with other Christian groups in Highgate and further develop our excellent working relationship with other neighbouring faith communities, not least the Birmingham Central Mosque. Our vicar should relish the challenge of reaching out to the occupants of a major new housing development taking shape towards the city centre, a development that may contain a very different, and probably more affluent, community than that presently around us.

Our new incumbent should have sympathy with and, preferably, sound knowledge of, traditional Anglo-Catholic liturgy and ceremonial, including eastward-facing celebration at the high altar, as well as traditional church music. Our vicar should be prepared to teach the catholic faith and to encourage the training of the laity for appropriate roles within the church. Our vicar should warmly embrace St Alban's ambition to be a beacon of more traditional church musical excellence, as well as reaching out to more recent church musicianship.

Our new incumbent should be prepared to undertake pastoral initiatives and to work with members of the congregation and the local community, giving leadership when necessary, but also giving due weight to the local experience of the laity, in exploring ways to develop our church's mission and seeking to grow the congregation, particularly in raising the church's profile within the Highgate community and beyond and helping people to find the liturgy accessible, without compromising its character.

Our vicar should be at ease with a liberal Anglo-Catholic congregation that is diverse in many ways: newcomers and longstanding members; young and old; those with sincerely held and well-reasoned differing views regarding, for example, the ordination of women or same-sex marriage. Our vicar will show understanding, respect and love for members of the congregation and others of all views.

Our vicar will respect the liturgical and musical traditions of the congregation and seek as far as

possible to make any changes perceived as necessary through open discussion, dialogue and persuasion.

Our vicar will provide an effective outreach to local young families and newcomers who might not initially feel at home in our traditional Sunday services, for example by reviving the Saturday afternoon Family Service, which showed promise before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The parish offers to the right priest the challenge and privilege of building on 160 years of Anglo-Catholic mission – religious, educational and social – in this diverse, challenged and newly-growing area of inner-city Birmingham.

The Context

1. Description of the Parish

The parish of St Alban & St Patrick is a historic inner-city Anglo-Catholic parish, just south of the city centre of Birmingham. Its origin was a religious and educational mission to the unchurched in the high-density slum housing of the new industrial suburb of Highgate, begun in 1865 by the Pollock brothers, two priests inspired by the Oxford Movement. The present church of St Alban the Martyr opened in 1881. Nearby a daughter church of St Patrick was opened in 1896.

The area was redeveloped in the 1950s and 1960s with most of the parishioners being relocated elsewhere in Birmingham and the old, terraced housing replaced by high-rise blocks and maisonettes. In 1966 St Patrick's was demolished and the two parishes amalgamated. Most of the 1960s high-rise flats and maisonettes have now in turn been demolished, replaced by town-house designs, some social housing and some owner-occupied or privately rented, while others have been refurbished. Waves of new immigrants from many parts of the world have moved into the parish. A recent development is an increase in the number of refugees and asylum-seekers housed in the parish, many families being placed in Magnolia House when they first arrive in the city. Although currently poor and socially disadvantaged, the parish does not suffer from problems of crime and severe anti-social behaviour to the same extent as some other inner-city areas of Birmingham.

Like many such churches in urban areas of deprivation, from its foundation St Alban's has relied financially, and often for leadership, on supporters living outside the parish. Urban renewal and consequent demographic changes have resulted in a mainly extra-parochial congregation, a few of whose members are from families formerly resident in the parish, or which were early supporters of the mission, while others have been attracted by the theological, liturgical and musical traditions of the parish, for which the beautiful church building provides a perfect setting.

Efforts to bring more local people into the congregation had some modest success through the involvement of our previous priest-in-charge, Fr Nicholas lo Polito, and some others of the congregation involved in community organizations and activities within the parish. More recently, before Covid, Fr Gerry Sykes had some success in reaching young families with an informal multi-media family service in the church hall on Saturdays. However, a large proportion of the local population is of other faiths.

Major new housing developments are bringing a new and probably very different population to the parish, with large housing blocks already partly occupied in the area between Moseley Street and Cheapside. New housing just outside the parish, on the opposite side of Belgrave Middleway is just being occupied. A massive development is about to come on stream on the site of the former Birmingham Wholesale Markets, turning the area into a new destination with residential buildings and cultural spaces. An urban park, a market, a cinema, bars, retail and office space are planned, and Birmingham Smithfield, as the development is called, is planned to offer a "mixture of new, modern sustainable homes in a green setting supported by a range of community facilities [which] will create an exemplar residential neighbourhood that will be one of the most desirable places to live in the city centre". These significant developments in the vicinity of St Alban's, though not all within the small parish, offer an important opportunity to welcome a new, and probably very different, local community to our church.

Population

In the 2021 census there were about 4,924 people living in the parish, an increase from about 4,500 in 2011, and 3,371 in 2001, and the population has continued to increase since then. The 2001, 2011 and 2021 censuses gave these ethnic and religious profiles for the parish:

Ethnicity	2001	2011	2021	Religion	2001	2011	2021
White	41%	30%	21%	Christian	45%	32%	24%
Asian	28%	26%	25%	Muslim	27%	38%	50%
Black	19%	27%	32%	Other Religion	6%	6%	4%
Mixed	8%	8%	7%	No Religion	11%	17%	16%
Other	4%	9%	15%	No Response	11%	7%	6%

In 2011 40% of the population of the parish were born outside the United Kingdom and 28% did not use English as their main language, with 8% unable to speak English well. (We do not yet have the figures for 2021.)

Unemployment, social deprivation and low income are common in the parish. The 2011 census shows 39% of the “working age” (16–64) population in receipt of an out-of-work benefit; 30% with no qualifications; and 19% in the NS-SeC “never worked and long-term unemployed” category. We do not have the same figures for the 2021 census, but the parish remains in the most deprived percentile, as the 109th most deprived of 12,178 Church of England parishes.

Housing, Commerce, Institutions and Transport

The parish has a high proportion of both social and private rented housing (51% and 25% respectively in 2021), still including some high-rise blocks. It includes light industry and a small shopping centre, Horton Square, as well as two GP practices (the Wand Medical Centre, 15 Frank Street, B12 0UF and Highgate Medical Centre, Frank Street, B12 0YA), two pharmacies, and five schools: three primary, one secondary and one special needs school.

Bounded on three sides by major roads, the parish is something of an island, with most public transport serving the periphery but within easy walking distance of the centre of the parish for the fit. A map of the parish is appended. The church is within the Birmingham Clean Air zone and older vehicles must pay a daily charge. The vicarage has ample off-road parking and there are currently no parking restrictions around the church, but traffic congestion and parking can be a problem when pupils are arriving at or leaving St Alban’s Academy, on Fridays around the time of midday prayer at the Central Mosque and at the time of Islamic festivals. However, the City Council has plans, still in consultation, to remove all free on-road parking within the inner ring road, surrounding the church with a mixture of paid short-stay parking and (paid for) residents-only parking bays.

A Key Facility

An important resource for the local community is Stanhope Hall Wellbeing Hub, located in Ketley Croft about 500 yards from St Alban’s Church. This is currently transitioning from ownership and management by Birmingham City Council as part of its “Wellbeing Services” run by a full-time manager, to being run by the Council’s spin-off “The Active Wellbeing Society” (TAWS), supported by volunteers. The attendees and local volunteers come from many faiths and are commonly people who find life tough and seek succour and friendship within the local community. It is a secular organisation but one where Christ’s work is put into practice in a quiet, non-confrontational way. It is a place where, when it is open, anyone can drop in at any time just to sit quietly, perhaps have a cup of tea, and chat to anyone who is around. Its garden offers outdoor activity as well as fresh produce.

Most of the activities at Stanhope are free of charge, though there is now a £2 per head charge for the weekly community lunch. Many of the activities are designed to improve the general health of local people both in the choice of food provided and in getting members active and “out of their chairs”. In past years and in association with St Alban’s Church, Stanhope Hall has hosted a winter night

shelter for homeless men as part of a Birmingham Churches Night Shelter initiative.

Highgate Community Support Ltd is based at Stanhope Hall and was founded by PCC members. It provides financial support for the weekly community lunches and other social activities through grants from the St Alban's School Trust and other charitable sources.

Other Places of Worship

St Anne's Roman Catholic Church

Just outside the border of the Parish on Alcester Street, St Anne's was the site of St. John Henry Newman's first Birmingham mission. At one time relations were friendly, with joint participation in ecumenical Advent and Lent courses and Palm Sunday processions, but there is now little if any contact. St. Anne's now shares a priest with the Church of the English Martyrs in Sparkhill.

Highgate Baptist Church

This is our near neighbour, situated on Conybere Street opposite St Alban's Academy. Their minister Revd Paul Walker was happy to work with us, and, in the past, we have participated in ecumenical Advent and Lent courses and been invited to their Church Anniversary celebration and other special events. Since the retirement of their minister, worship is led by guest speakers as well as church members. The Birmingham branch of an African Church, The Redeemed Evangelical Mission, also uses the Baptist Church building, and we have recently been told that they have bought the building, and the Baptists are now renting from them.

Other Christian Denominations

Hope Community Church, 13 Ravenhurst Street B12 0HD

Birmingham Vineyard Church, 174-178 Barford Street B12 7EP

In the past St Alban's has played host to African Pentecostal congregations and to different congregations of the Eritrean Orthodox church, which have since moved on to accommodation better suited to their needs. In January 2025 a Tigrayan group hired St Alban's for an all-night Timkat ceremony at Orthodox Epiphany.

There is also a Seventh-day Adventist church on the edge of the parish (Camp Hill B12 0JP).

Birmingham Central Mosque

This is an important centre of Muslim worship in Birmingham. Friendly relations exist, especially through links with St Alban's Academy.

Church Information and Parish Data

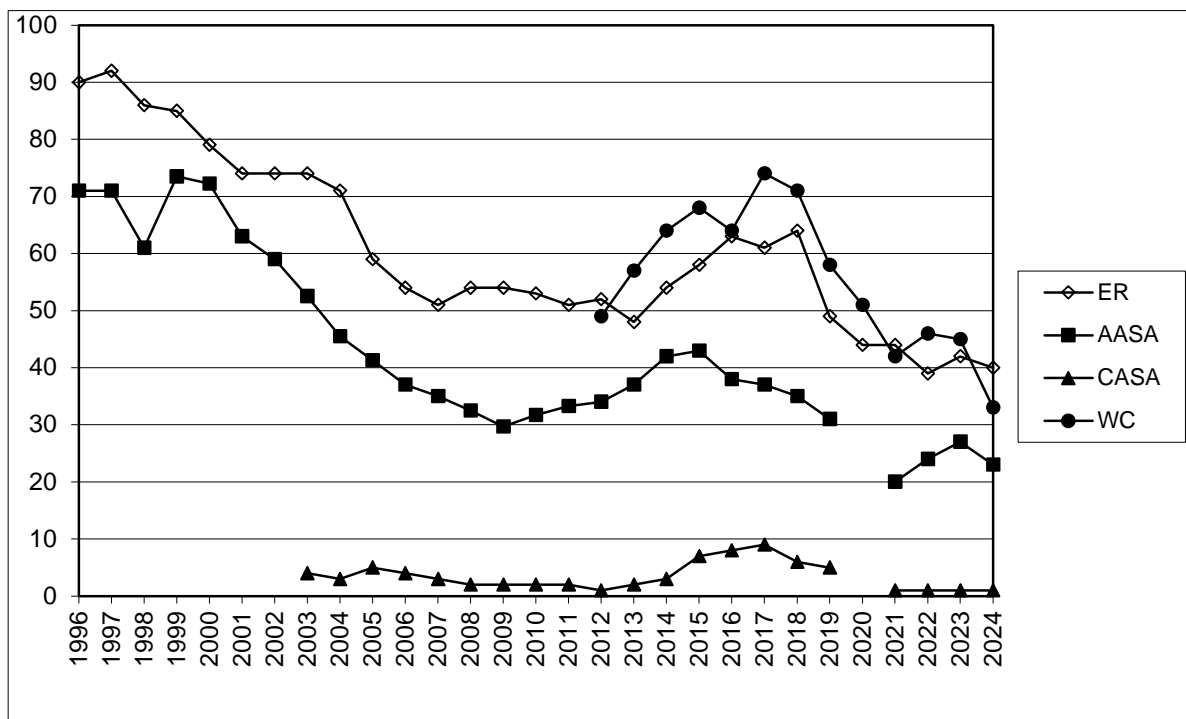
2. Pattern of Church Life

The Congregation

Our congregation is small, and certainly needs to grow, but we are ethnically diverse, inclusive and warmly welcoming to all, whatever their background, sexual orientation or familiarity with our traditions. The present congregation includes regular members from Antigua, Canada, Eritrea, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Nigeria, and Singapore, and of course multicultural and multi-class Birmingham, plus occasional friends from Iran, Ethiopia and Romania.

At the 2025 APCM the newly compiled Electoral Roll had 31 members, six of whom (19%) lived in the parish, another person who did not complete an application in time was waiting to be added. The previous roll had 40 members, 9 of whom lived in the parish. Of those on the old roll, 7 had moved away, one had died, and 3 had ceased to attend. Three of those on the new roll were not on the old roll, one living in the parish. For 2024 the average attendance at normal Sunday Mass was 23 adults and 1 child, while on average a further 4 followed the service online over Zoom. The Worshipping Community (all who attend at least once a month) assessed in December 2024 was 33, with 0 under 10, 1 aged 11-17, 17 aged 18-69 and 15 aged 70 or over. In 2024 there was one adult baptism, two

confirmations of candidates from the congregation, three funerals, and no weddings, blessings after a civil ceremony or services of thanksgiving after the birth of a child. In 2025, to the date of this profile, there has been one infant baptism in the church.



The graph on the above shows changes in the congregation measured by the Electoral Roll (ER), Average Sunday Attendance by adults (AASA) and children (ACSA) and the newer Worshipping Community (WC) measure of those of all ages attending at least once a month. The average Sunday attendance declined steadily for ten years from 1999 to 2009, rose again to 2016 and has declined every year since, apart from the recovery in 2022 and 2023 after Covid-19. The decline in Electoral Roll and Worshipping Community has lagged behind that in Sunday Attendance, with an increase in those attending less frequently than every Sunday. Streaming of our Sunday Mass over Zoom, begun during the Covid lockdowns, enables some of these to follow the service online. It is clearly essential for the future of the parish that growth is restored.

Most of the present congregation is drawn from outside the parish, from across the city and beyond. Some have personal and family roots in the parish and still travel to the church from the suburbs. A good proportion are professional people. Many members of this diverse congregation have demonstrated great loyalty to the church, which has been expressed in commitment of time and effort and in generosity with money and expertise. Individual members of the congregation participate in diocesan bodies and in other bodies (heritage, civic, charitable, inter-faith and ecumenical). This often brings a wider perspective to parochial discussions. Over the last decade a small number have joined the congregation from the parish and its immediate neighbourhood, and it is very important that efforts are made to continue this trend.

In 1994 the PCC passed Resolutions A and B under the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993 but did not request Alternative Episcopal Oversight. When these expired the PCC voted on, but did not pass a Resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration. The present congregation remains divided on the issue of the ordination of women, with a wide range of views on either side, some strongly held, some nuanced. Only one couple regularly attending on a normal Sunday choose not to attend once a month when Mthr Charlotte, our Anglo-Catholic Missioner, is our celebrant. We hope to continue to live amicably with our different opinions.

Regular Services

- Weekly: Sunday 10:00 AM Sung Mass, with average attendance of 24 on normal Sundays in 2024.

After the service tea, coffee and biscuits are served in St Patrick's Room.

- Monthly: Sunday 6:00 PM Solemn Choral Evensong and Benediction. This is a recent initiative by our choir. It attracts choristers from other parishes to take part, but so far relatively few in the congregation for this cathedral-style evensong, average attendance 27 in 2024 (including choir).

Until Covid-19 we also had two regular weekday services in church:

- Weekly: Thursday 12:30 PM said Mass in St Patrick's Chapel, average attendance 4½ in 2019.
- Weekly: Saturday 9:00 AM said Mass in the Lady Chapel, average attendance 6 in 2019, which was followed by a breakfast of tea, coffee and toast in St Patrick's Room.

Attendance had already declined considerably over the years before the lock downs for Covid, and they were not reinstated, due to lack of support amongst the present congregation. Another service recently discontinued was:

- Saturday 5:00 PM informal multi-media "Family Mass" in our church hall, St Patrick's Room during school term-time. Average attendance was 5½ children and 5½ adults in 2019, but only 1½ children and 5 adults in 2023. In 2024 it became clear that a family which had started to send apologies every week was unlikely to attend again, and the service was replaced by a confirmation class for the remaining 11-year-old child.

Liturgical Year

Choral Masses for major holy days falling on weekdays (if not transferred to Sundays) are normally held at 7:30 PM on weekdays or 11:00 AM on Saturdays.

The liturgical year begins with Advent. Last year during Advent there were 'Christmas' visits by schools and we hosted Birmingham Bach Choir's service of Nine Lessons and Carols. At Christmas we had "Midnight Mass" from 9:00 PM (formerly 11:00 PM but we have an ageing congregation) and Christmas Day Mass at 10:00 AM. Epiphany is currently transferred to Sunday in the calendar that we use. On Candlemas we usually have an evening Mass, starting with a candle-lit procession from the hall into church, followed by a St Blaise' Eve blessing of throats.

Lent starts with the imposition of ashes at an evening Mass on Ash Wednesday. In previous years Stations of the Cross were made on Friday evenings in Lent, but this year, during the interregnum, they will only be made on the morning of Good Friday. Although it falls in Lent, we celebrate the feast of St Patrick, our secondary patron, with a Choral Mass, usually on the following Saturday, followed by soup, bread and cheese. Holy Week starts with the blessing of palm crosses and a procession into church – sometimes, if the weather permits, this starts outdoors in the park opposite the church or else from the hall. The traditional Triduum services are held. The Mass on Maundy Thursday starts at 7:30 PM and ends with solemn transfer of the Blessed Sacrament to an altar of repose and a watch until midnight ending with a short, said service of Tenebrae. The Solemn Liturgy for Good Friday starts at 12:00 noon and the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday starts at 9:00 PM with the blessing of new fire outside the church. Ascension Day is kept with a 7:30 PM Mass. Corpus Christi is currently transferred to Sunday in the calendar that we use, and is celebrated with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction at the end of Mass.

During May, "Mary's Month", a shrine is placed before the statue of Our Lady. In the past we held an annual May Devotion service with a procession, to which members of other Anglo-Catholic parishes were invited. In June the feast of St Alban, our principal patron, is usually celebrated on the following Saturday, with a buffet lunch after Mass. The feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated in August and in September we keep Holy Cross Day, which is the anniversary of the opening of the mission that became our parish. Recently we have marked the Season of Creation, and since the early days of St Alban's Mission, we have kept a Harvest Festival. All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day are both celebrated – the latter with a Requiem Mass. The liturgical year ends with the Solemnity of Christ the Universal King, celebrated with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. at the end of Mass.

Formerly each month one of the weekday Masses was a requiem for the departed on our chantry roll whose anniversaries fall in that month, and in November several of the weekday services were requiems for departed friends and relatives whose names are submitted by the congregation.

Liturgical Practice

The church community is proud of its ceremonial tradition with vestments, robed servers and choir, incense used every Sunday and on major Holy Days, sanctuary bells used at every Mass and the Angelus rung daily. We have an impressive collection of vestments and other liturgical properties and a currently very small team of dedicated and experienced servers. More servers are needed.

The Blessed Sacrament has been reserved in the church continuously since 1911, currently in the south or St Patrick's Chapel, making this also the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. There is also a tabernacle on the High Altar.

The church building, designed to draw attention towards the High Altar, favours Eastward facing celebration, with movement at the offertory from the centre of the church where the Liturgy of the Word has taken place to the High Altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Experiments with a portable nave altar placed at the crossing did not stand the test of time.

Shape of the Sunday Mass

We use Common Worship Rite I with options and variations under Canon B5(1) resulting in a liturgy similar in shape to the Roman rite, with the peace after the consecration. The Creed and Eucharistic Prayers use Common Worship texts, with prefaces mainly from the (1975) Roman missal.

Worshippers are provided with seasonal service booklets produced in house (an example is appended), copies of *The New English Hymnal* and sheets with the readings and propers for the Sunday Mass on one side and notices and prayer intentions for the week on the reverse. There are two large television screens at the front of the nave (first introduced during Covid, when booklets and hymn books could not be used). During the last incumbency most of the service was displayed on these, and the congregation largely relied on these rather than the service booklets. During the present interregnum we are using the screens to display hymn numbers and other information and encouraging the use of the booklets.

The choir sings the propers to plainsong and the Kyrie and Gloria (in season), Sanctus/Benedictus and Agnus Dei using traditional Mass settings (sometimes in Latin); leads the responsorial psalm and sings a motet during communion. The Creed is currently sung, and the Lord's Prayer is sung on alternate weeks. In Advent and Lent the Asperges is used in place of the normal penitential rite.

The Old and New Testament lessons are read by lay members of the congregation. The Gospel Book is carried from the High Altar into the midst of the congregation where the Celebrant (or Deacon if one is present) reads or intones the Gospel. The intercessions are led (with a scripted guide) by a lay member of the congregation.

At the end of Sunday Mass during the final hymn the altar party moves to the statue of Our Lady, which is censed and the Angelus (or seasonally the Regina Cœli or Salve Regina) is sung. An organ voluntary follows (when seasonally appropriate) before tea, coffee and biscuits are served in our hall, St Patrick's Room.

Provision for Children

We have a Children's Corner at the west end of the nave where parents can sit with young children during services. Currently the only child attending regularly is aged 12, recently confirmed, and has just joined the serving team. Several years ago, we had an optional Sunday Club for toddlers to 12-year-olds, who moved after the Gospel from the church to St Patrick's Room, where they explored topics related to the scripture readings for the day, returning to the church at the Communion. More recently we have had the separate "Family Mass" on Saturday afternoon in St Patrick's Room, which flourished before the Covid pandemic.

Occasional Offices

Infant Baptism normally takes place during the Sunday Mass but is currently rare. It is unusual for parishioners from outside the congregation to choose to marry at St Alban's, but parish funerals are less uncommon. A Requiem Mass is usual for the funerals of members of the congregation.

There are no set times for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and spiritual direction, which are available by appointment.

Devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham

The parish has a long association with the Shrine at Walsingham. A well-supported annual weekend pilgrimage to the Shrine took place in May for over 50 years, with about 20 attending in recent years. However, after the cancellation of pilgrimages in 2020 and 2021 numbers fell to 9 in 2023 (10 is the minimum booking) and we did not organise a pilgrimage in 2024 and have not done so for 2025. There is a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham in our church and the congregation ensures that a lamp for the parish burns continuously in the Holy House at Walsingham.

Assistant Clergy

In the past we have had the services of honorary assistant priests and other non-stipendiary clergy. We have enjoyed the occasional services of retired and non-parochial clergy who value St Alban's tradition and enjoy celebrating and officiating here. Fr Andrew Lenox-Conyngham, who regularly assisted Fr Gerry, has taken the lead in celebrating Mass during the present interregnum.

Lay Assistants

There are currently no Readers. Three of the congregation are Eucharistic Ministers, two regularly taking turns to administer the chalice.

Church Music

St Alban's has had a long and distinguished history of performing church music of high quality, a history which we are anxious to continue. We have a highly experienced, paid, Director of Music in post, and have previously also had both Organ and Choral Scholars. Many past organists have gone on to cathedral posts. One is currently Professor of Music at Glasgow University, while David Briggs, Artist in Residence at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York, was Organist at St Alban's between 1979 and 1981. We are affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music.

Music at St Alban's has been important from the very beginning, as befits a church in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of worshipping with all the senses. Its role is to enhance the spoken word and liturgy to take us, spiritually, to worship with the whole company of heaven. Plainsong was introduced early on, and hymn singing was important in drawing people into the church; indeed Fr. Thomas Benson Pollock was an eminent hymn writer. The New English Hymnal is used.

The building, with its excellent acoustic and spacious interior, lends dignity to the liturgy and music, enhancing both. The resulting style of worship is unique in the diocese, with many people travelling some distance to attend.

The current choir consists of about eight dedicated regulars, and several others who are unable to attend regularly. They rehearse on Thursday evenings and before services. This number is a minimum for our requirements, and recruitment of more adult singers and the establishment of a junior treble line is planned.

There is an extensive music library in the large choir vestry, which contains a modern upright piano. There is a venerable, but recently renovated, Bechstein grand piano in the church, available for recitals.

The main organ is a good medium-sized 3-manual and pedal instrument originally by Bryceson, and most recently rebuilt by Rushworth & Dreaper. While it is generally well maintained it is currently

in need of substantial expenditure to replace badly-worn leathers, and a fund-raising recital series is planned (to be launched by David Briggs in July 2025 and featuring three organists of other Pearson-designed church buildings). A monthly organ recital series is planned starting in 2026, to run March through to October, to help fund the purchase of music and regular organ maintenance. The organ is suitable for use as both a liturgical and concert instrument.

There is also a chamber organ, which is a single-manual, manually-blown instrument from the first half of the nineteenth century, mounted on a mobile platform. It is with us on indefinite loan.

The main musical service during the week is the 10.00 a.m. Sunday Choral Mass. At this service the choir sing the propers to plainsong, with varying choral settings of the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus and Agnus Dei of the ordinary. The Creed is currently said or sung to Merbecke, and the Lord's Prayer to Rimsky-Korsakoff's setting (on alternating weeks). When appropriate the sequence is sung before the Gospel. In addition, the choir sings a communion motet.

The Choir has recently established a Solemn Choral Evensong and Benediction on the fourth Sunday of each month. This allows us to invite singers from other choirs to experience our wonderful building and its acoustic. This can offer people a different form of worship with which some are more comfortable, and therefore more likely to attend than – what is rightly our main focus – the Mass.

The choir has built up a good range of settings of the ordinary, ranging from Renaissance (Hassler, Palestrina, Vittoria), through Classical (Haydn, Mozart) (occasionally with orchestra), to Modern (Darke, Sumsion, Duruflé). Plainsong settings (in Greek or Latin) are usually sung once a month and are popular with the congregation. In our generous acoustic, the intoning of the prayers, Gospel, Dismissal etc. is appreciated and helps provide a clarity that a sound system cannot match.

We enjoy excellent relations with both the Birmingham Conservatoire and the University of Birmingham. The acoustics of the building are appreciated by such notable choral conductors as Paul Spicer and Jeffrey Skidmore, and it is regularly used as both a concert and a recording venue by the Conservatoire and others. We will continue to nurture and expand these external musical relationships.

3. Description of Church Buildings and Facilities

The Church Building

Originally known as St Alban's, Bordesley, from its earliest days St Alban's was one of the best-known Anglo-Catholic churches in the Midlands. Today it is known as St Alban's, Highgate, having been moved from Bordesley Deanery to Handsworth and Central Deanery.

Opened in 1881, the church is a magnificent Victorian Gothic structure designed by John Loughborough Pearson. A distinctive landmark saddleback tower designed by E.F. Reynolds was added in 1938. There are no tower bells, but we have an effective electronic bell system. A good impression of the outside and its surroundings can be gained from Google Street View, and the appended pictures give some idea of the beauty and dignity of the interior. The architectural importance of the building is recognised with Grade II* listing. The church attracts group visits from the Victorian Society, decorative arts societies, the U3A and schools, and we open the church for the annual Heritage Open Days and Birmingham Heritage Week.

Exterior floodlighting was installed in 2000 but is no longer functional, requiring complete renewal when funds allow. The interior was sensitively relit in 2012, enhancing appreciation of the vaulting, unfortunately just before suitable LED lamps were available. There is an induction loop for those with hearing aids. There are two large video screens (on moveable stands) either side of the chancel screen, and WiFi is available although not in all parts of the church.

The church has two side-chapels, the Lady Chapel and St Patrick's Chapel. These were previously used for weekday services. St Patrick's Chapel houses an important Arts and Crafts reredos by the Birmingham sisters Kate and Myra Bunce. Their work is commemorated by a Civic Society blue plaque, unveiled in 2015, on the exterior of the church. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in St Patrick's chapel.

Ancillary Buildings

Attached to the main church building are the sacristy, choir and servers' vestries, a small wardens' office and our church hall, St Patrick's Room, built in 1984, which has kitchen and recently refurbished toilet facilities including a toilet adapted for wheelchair users and a baby changing station. The large choir vestry, part of the original building has very recently been refurbished with a new insulated tiled floor and new lighting.

A path from Stanhope Street offers separate step-free access to the church and hall from a 'cloister' lobby. The hall has a wall-mounted screen and overhead-mounted digital projector and WiFi is available.

Church Grounds

St Alban's has no graveyard. There are garden areas on each side, between the church and Conybere Street and between the church and the vicarage. In recent years we have left the grass on each side of the church unmown until late June allowing wildflowers to flourish and encouraging pollinating insects. This has contributed to obtaining a Bronze Eco Church award.

Heating and Lighting

The church is heated by gas heaters around the walls, some balanced flue convectors and some fan-assisted heaters. A number of these have failed permanently, and others are out of action awaiting service. The size of the building and the large area of single-glazed windows prevent the heaters from achieving a comfortable temperature for the congregation in cold weather. The vestries and hall are heated by a separate gas-fired heating/hot water system. The choir vestry is heated independently by a gas boiler and radiators. Each of these can achieve a comfortable temperature.

The PCC is on three year "Green Gas" and 100% renewable electricity tariffs. The PCC has replaced the more accessible incandescent filament lamps and former fluorescent tube lighting in the kitchen and choir vestry with low-energy LED lamps, but most of the church lighting system, which is not accessible without specialist equipment, uses filament and discharge lamps.

Recent Church Renovation Works

Church Roof Renewal. The whole of the church roof has been renewed, resulting in removal of the church from Historic England's 'at risk' register. About 20% was renewed in 2016 and the remainder in 2020, together with repairs to high-level stonework and windows, and improvement to step-free access to the church with the aid of a National Lottery Heritage Fund project grant with the title "*Revealing St Alban's Hidden Heritage*", which included research and the preparation of new interpretive materials in the form of leaflets and much new material in the Heritage & History section of our website.

Lowered Ground Level. In 2016/17 the ground at the East end of the church, which was above the internal floor level, was lowered and a French Drain installed to address damp, which was causing damage to the interior stonework. At the same time a long-standing defect in the sewer was discovered and repaired and the old lead water main was replaced with plastic piping.

Removal of Asbestos. In 2021, a small area of flooring collapsed in the north transept, revealing asbestos insulation board covering a chamber connected to old heating ducts. The asbestos was removed in 2022 by specialist contractors, together with traces of asbestos in a disused underground

boiler room and asbestos-containing vinyl floor tiles in the choir vestry. Plans to reinstate the floor in the north transept were prepared in 2023, but funds are not currently.

Toilets Refurbished. Funded by donors, the toilets were refurbished in 2023 with modern hot-air hand-driers and a new baby changing station.

Choir Vestry Renovated. The floor of the choir vestry has been replaced, incorporating thermal insulation, surfaced with quarry tiles. At the same time the old fluorescent tube lighting was replaced with LED lighting in fittings of heritage appearance, and the room redecorated. Begun in 2024, the work was completed in March 2025.

Kitchen Roof Altered. In July 2023 (hitherto) extreme rainfall washed moss from the hall roof onto the flat roof of the kitchen and adjacent lobby blocking the drains. This roof sloped inwards towards the south gable of the hall, resulting in pooling behind the parapet and water entry, bringing down part of the kitchen ceiling and soaking the floor of the hall. To prevent future flooding due to blockage of internal drains the kitchen roof has been altered to slope away from the hall and discharge rainwater through chutes in the parapet to external down pipes. At the same time the lighting and ventilation of the kitchen was updated. Begun in 2024 this was completed in January 2025. Unfortunately, after alteration of the roof there has been water ingress to the kitchen area, which has been traced to nearby defects in the hall roof and further repairs have just been carried out.

The Vicarage

Situated adjacent to the church, at 120 Stanhope Street, the vicarage is a large well-designed three-storey house built in the 1960s. The ground floor has a large kitchen, two reception rooms, a large study, a toilet, a utility room and an integral garage. The first floor has four bedrooms and a bathroom with toilet, and there are two additional rooms on the second floor. There is gas central heating and the principal downstairs rooms have either secondary glazing or double glazing. A fully monitored alarm is fitted. There is a good-sized garden and the house is opposite a small public park on the former site of St Alban's School, in a quiet road. A gated drive provides additional secure parking.

Church Organisations

St Alban's Church Printing Unit

The parish has for many years had a volunteer Printing Unit which carries out work for the parish and other churches and organisations. It is run from their own home by two volunteers using a large Canon machine which prints, staples and folds booklets. Its external work, including monthly magazines for two other churches has provided an income of £2,000 annually to the church for some years. However, the volunteers who run the printing unit are unable to continue beyond this year due to age and increasing infirmity.

4. Administration and Finance

Financial Situation

The 2024 parish Statement of Financial Activities is appended.

Planned Giving and Gift Aid

The congregation is noted for the generosity of its giving. There is a great variation in means within the congregation. A planned-giving scheme is in operation through bank order, which contributed £14,019 in 2024. Additional open-plate giving contributed £1,822. An annual Gift Day in November makes a major contribution to the General Fund contributing £11,899 in 2024, while other donations to the General Fund provided £5,411. These figures include tax recovered through Gift Aid declarations and the Small Donations Scheme. In 2024 93% of net income from donors to the General Fund was covered by Gift Aid declarations or by the Small Donations Scheme.

The Diocesan Common Fund

For 2025 we are paying the sum of £31,200 to the Diocesan Common Fund in monthly instalments. This is a stretching target for the PCC, given the size of the congregation. In 2024, and for many years previously, our requested contribution to the Common Fund was based on a half-time post, shared with a half-time post as Chaplain to the neighbouring Ark St Alban's Academy, and the sum we are paying reflects this. For 2025 we were unexpectedly informed that we have a full-time post, and the post of Chaplain has no official existence. However, we have since been informed that, following discussions between the Diocesan Director of Education and Ark St Alban's Academy it has been agreed that the next incumbent will offer fourteen hours per week of chaplaincy in term time and there will be a financial arrangement with the diocese to recognise that. The Common Fund absorbs most of the income to the General Fund from individual donors, so it is fortunate that the PCC also receives grants from three Charitable Trusts.

Connected Charities

Three Charitable Trusts are connected to the Parish: The Trustees of St Alban's School, the St Patrick Fund (commonly known as the Trustees of St Patrick's School and now administered as a linked charity by the Trustees of St Alban's School) and the Aspinall Trust. These distribute income from the capital derived from the sale of the sites of the former St Alban's and St Patrick's parish schools and from the bequest of Kathleen Aspinall, in accordance with the terms of their respective trusts. The PCC receives a total of between £21,000 and £25,000 annually for various purposes from these trusts. The incumbent and churchwardens are *ex officio* trustees of the Aspinall Trust. Members of the PCC are among the current Trustees of St Alban's School.

Clergy Expenses

Appropriate expenses are paid in full up to an agreed annual limit, on receipt of detailed accounts. Car travel is reimbursed at diocesan rates. Secretarial assistance is not provided.

Structure of the PCC

The PCC currently consists of ten lay members. Three are *ex officio* members: the Churchwardens, one of whom is also a Deanery Synod member, and a second Deanery Synod member, who is also an elected member of the PCC. Under a resolution of the APCM in 2013 up to three members may be elected annually to serve for three years, overriding the default number of two for an electoral roll of 50 or less (the electoral was 40 at the 2024 APCM). Currently there are seven directly elected members: three were elected at the 2022 APCM to serve until the 2025 APCM, three were elected in 2023 to serve until 2026 (one of whom was also elected to Deanery Synod) but one resigned on moving away from the West Midlands, and two were elected in 2024 to serve until 2027 (there being no third candidate). The Director of Music is currently a co-opted member.

The PCC is a registered charity, number 1169941, with the full name “The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Alban and St Patrick, Highgate, Birmingham” and the working title “St Alban’s PCC, Highgate, Birmingham”.

The PCC meets 5–7 times during the year, and has the following committees and working groups:

Standing Committee

This consists of the Churchwardens (one of whom is also the Treasurer), the Secretary and another member of the PCC. Normally it would be chaired by the vicar; following his retirement another member is needed to make up the required minimum of five members. The frequency and business of its meetings has varied with circumstances. Although it has the authority to transact business of the PCC between its meetings, in recent years it met regularly only in advance of each PCC meeting to agree the agenda for the full meeting, and since Covid-19 this has instead been achieved by informal consultation by the Vicar.

5. Opportunities and Expectations

Ark St Alban’s Academy

Ark St Alban’s Academy, situated in new premises on Conybere Street, is sponsored by the educational charity Ark (Absolute Return for Kids). Until 2009 it was a Church of England Voluntary Aided school, and it remains legally a Church of England school, the only such secondary school in the city. It includes a sixth form. It is the successor to the first school opened in 1865 as part of St Alban’s Mission. Admission is non-selective, mainly by physical closeness to the school building, and hence is essentially a neighbourhood school. It includes students of many faiths but predominantly Sunni Muslims. This reflects the presence in the parish of the Birmingham Central Mosque.

The Academy was rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted in 2024. Though the educational level of the students on entry is well below the national average and English is a second language for many, their eventual GCSE results are good. In recent years, pupils have gained places to study at prestigious universities such as Cambridge, Durham, Warwick and the London School of Economics. Recent cohorts have each seen multiple pupils gaining places to study medicine.

The congregation is enthusiastic about the role of the incumbent as Academy Chaplain, seeing it as a 21st century continuation of the original vision of the Pollock brothers who founded the first school as an integral part of their mission. Members of the congregation have served on the Governing Body of the Academy and as members of the Trustees of St Alban’s School, which provides some financial support to Academy activities, and owns land opposite the church (the former site of the school buildings) which is leased to the Academy for a peppercorn rent. Nevertheless, it is likely that any recruits to the congregation will come from work in the wider parish and beyond. The school received four food bags weekly from our Food Bank for families known to be in need of assistance.

Other Schools in the Parish

Calthorpe Academy, Darwin Street B12 0TP, is a specialist school for pupils aged 3–19 with severe, often life-limiting disabilities, many in wheelchairs; In the past it held an annual “carol service” in the church over two or three days to accommodate many children in wheelchairs with individual carers. However, with the departure of the members of staff who organised this, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this has not taken place since 2018.

Chandos Primary School, 17-21 Vaughton Street B12 0YN, is adjacent to St Alban’s Academy and is one of its feeder schools. In recent years it has held a carol service at St Alban’s Church before Christmas, attended in 2024 by 235 children and 45 adults.

We consider that strengthening involvement with Chandos Primary School and renewing links with Calthorpe Academy could be a significant part of our mission to the community.

St Anne's Catholic Primary School, 7 Lowe Street B12 0ER, is also a feeder to St Alban's Academy but looks to St Anne's Roman Catholic Church.

Harper Bell Seventh-day Adventist School, 29 Ravenhurst Street B12 0EJ, looks to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Percy Shurmer Primary Academy, Longmore Street B12 9ED, is just outside our parish boundary, on the other side of the Belgrave Middleway, but is closer to St Alban's than to its own parish church of St Paul's, Balsall Heath. It has brought groups of children to visit the church as part of RE, bringing 50 children and 10 adults in December 2024.

St Basils Conybere Gardens

Situated in former Lench's Trust Victorian alms-houses next to the church on Conybere Street, Conybere Gardens provides supported semi-independent accommodation for up to 36 single young people, mostly with troubled backgrounds and/or care leavers. It is run by St Basils, a West Midlands charity dedicated to preventing youth homelessness by providing support and accommodation. Residents receive three food bags a week from our Food Bank. In the past we have invited residents to Shrove Tuesday pancake parties, recently without success, and we hope more can be done to foster relations with the transient population of young people there.

Magnolia House

Magnolia House, 73 Conybere Street, almost opposite the church, is a residential and day centre set up to offer a temporary home for families who have, for whatever reason, just entered the benefits system, while waiting for a more permanent home. The involvement of the food bank over past months has mainly been to support those who are still waiting for their benefits to start coming through, after which they do not receive further food bags. However, one refugee with young children and poor English has been living there for some time and has continued to receive weekly food bags. She has occasionally attended our Sunday service, although she has recently been offered a flat elsewhere in Birmingham and may move on soon.

St Anne's Hostel

St Anne's Hostel at 112 Moseley Street, B12 0RY in our parish provides accommodation for homeless men and their dogs. Our Foodbank is currently providing two individual bags fortnightly to St Anne's and we have supported them through the collection at the Birmingham Bach Choir's service of nine lessons and carols and the collection at our own Christmas services.

New Housing

Major new housing developments in and around the parish are bringing new people to the area, with a potential for growing the congregation.

Links with the Wider Church

We have in the past supported the Anglican Church in Malawi (which is linked to the Diocese of Birmingham) through annual donations both to the Birmingham diocesan Malawi Fund and directly to a priest in Zomba, whom we knew from time that he spent attached to our parish when training in Birmingham to assist with the school fees of students there. We also have a link to St Thomas' Theological College in Karachi, Pakistan, through the Revd Dr Pervaiz Sultan who was our priest-in-charge from 2011 to 2013 before returning to his previous post as Principal of the College. However, in recent years we have had no surplus from which to make such donations.

Significant Recent History

6. Key Events or Activities in the Recent Past

Recent Initiatives in Mission and Ministry

The parish has joined with those of St George's, Edgbaston; St John's, Perry Barr; St Matthew's, Perry Beeches; and St Mark's, Kingstanding, in a five-year mission project to grow new disciples in each parish and pilot new ways that could be transferrable to other Anglo-Catholic settings. The project is being facilitated by a full-time Missioner, Mother Charlotte Gibson, who was licensed at St Alban's Church on the 11th of April 2024. Her post is funded by a grant from the Church Commissioners.

Our parish has also recently been placed in an Oversight Group with St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter, St John's & St Peter's, Ladywood, and St Martin's in the Bullring, but the future implications of this grouping of disparate parishes for mission or ministry is as yet unclear.

During the closure of the church for Covid-19 Fr Gerry set up streaming of Sunday Mass over Zoom for the congregation. This has been continued since, with an average of four, who would not be able to attend through infirmity or distance, following the service.

A Difficult Issue the Church has had to Tackle

As in many Anglo-Catholic parishes, the ordination of women has been a divisive issue, with a wide range of responses from joyful acceptance to leaving the Church of England and joining the Roman Catholic Church. In November 2016 Resolutions A and B under the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993 expired. The PCC had passed these in 1994 by majorities of 68% and 89%, respectively, but had not voted on requesting Alternative Episcopal Oversight. In January 2017 the PCC voted on a Resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration. This was not carried, with equal votes for and against. The present congregation remains divided on the issue of the ordination of women, with a wide range of views, some strongly held, some nuanced, but the proportion overtly opposed to the ordination of women has decreased since then.

Good News Stories

- We have replaced the life-expired Victorian roof of our church and lowered the ground level around the east end, leading to removal of our building from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.
- Livestreaming our Sunday Mass over Zoom, introduced by Fr Gerry during Covid-19, has enabled members of the congregation unable to take part in person to remain in touch.
- As well as our website (www.saintalban.co.uk) we have a Facebook Page (StAlbanBirmingham) with a growing number of followers.
- Starting in September 2023 we have reintroduced a monthly Solemn Choral Evensong and Benediction, which attracts a number of members from other church choirs to take part and is slowly building a congregation for this "Cathedral-style" service, although again these are mainly visitors from other congregations.
- Our Director of Music has planned a series of monthly Organ Recitals starting in July this year, beginning with a visit from internationally renowned David Briggs, himself a former organist at St Alban's Church.
- We have the assistance of our Anglo-Catholic Missioner.

Vision for the Future

7. Future Mission and Ministry

We believe that there are many in our neighbourhood who have not yet heard or understood the good news of Jesus Christ and that some of these may benefit from an encounter with Christ through the living community of St Alban's Parish Church.

St Alban's Church has always attracted people, not always from a settled church background and often from outside our parish boundaries, who have found here a serious, reflective approach to religious observance incorporated in the beauty and dignity of traditional catholic practice and traditional church music within the Church of England. We hope to continue to offer such people an attractive and transcendent spiritual vision.

As a PCC we hope to carry forward the threefold mission – religious, educational and social – of the Pollock brothers who founded our parish in 1865 when, as James Pollock wrote, the Mission District had “a population of about 4,500 poor people. There was no Church, Dissenting Chapel, Mission Room, School, endowment, grant, or any other spiritual provision for the inhabitants.”

- We will strive to encourage new growth of our congregation to achieve a sustainable level of attendance and age balance.
- We will continue to support the work of Ark St Alban's Academy, successor to the schools founded by the Pollocks, through supporting the continued role of the incumbent as Chaplain, although we believe that the balance between work in the school and work in the parish and community needs to be redressed in favour of the latter.
- We will continue to serve the local community through the United Highgate Food Bank and support for Stanhope Hall Wellbeing Hub.

As a platform from which we hope with God's help to achieve these goals:

- We will maintain the distinctive liturgical and musical style of our worship, which makes best use of our building and the talents and experience of our congregation, while working to make all visitors welcome and seeking to help those with a different, or no, religious background to understand the liturgy.
- We will continue to secure the future of our church building through repairs and maintenance.
- We will work to make more people aware of what we have to offer and to make the church building accessible to the public for longer periods outside our service times and to encourage additional users and uses for our building.

Enclosures:

Map of the Parish

Photographs of the Church

Annual Report & SOFA for 2024

Ordinary Time after Easter Mass Booklet

April and May 2025 Parish Magazines

Amanda M. Cadman
Churchwarden

Christopher A. Smith
Churchwarden