



St. Paul's Church

Boxley Road • Maidstone

<https://stpaulsmaidstone.org/>

The Mission of Our Church

The mission of our church is to deepen the discipleship of our current members through meaningful worship, learning together and supporting one another. Our goal is to cultivate a vibrant and engaged community of believers who are empowered to grow in their faith and share it with others.

As we strive to grow the church numerically, we are mindful of the importance of welcoming, embracing and affirming the diverse members of our community regardless of age, background, ability, sexuality, heritage or personal circumstances. Jesus welcomed everyone and so do we. Our aim is to create a safe space where everyone can contribute and feel valued and supported.



Above all, we seek to reflect the love of God in all that we do, both as a worshipping congregation and in our wider community. We recognise that our mission extends beyond our walls; we are committed to serving and supporting others, and welcome the support that others are able to offer us. Through our beliefs and behaviours we aim to make God's love known to all.

Our vision and Priorities

Our vision is to be a community where diversity is celebrated and where all people are genuinely encouraged and empowered to participate fully in the life of the church. We know that we need to grow numerically and that some of this growth must include children and families. We want to be a vibrant, dynamic and energetic church but one that makes room for those who appreciate tradition as well as more reflective, meditative worship.

The word cloud included with this profile was the result of asking each member of the congregation to express in three words or short phrases their missional priorities for St. Paul's moving forward. The size of each word reflects how many times it was used and whilst we've not been able to include absolutely

every sentiment expressed, we hope that we have honoured the spirit of the overwhelming majority of responses. It's clear that inclusivity, fellowship, community and children and families are very important to us. The word 'tradition' also appeared a number of times which might seem contradictory, but we believe that tradition doesn't have to mean always doing things the same way. We value tradition because it has been developed over the centuries but also because it does not stand still; it continues to develop; a living thing from one generation to another.



Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the Parish

We are a genuinely inclusive and welcoming community, and this can be both a strength and a weakness. We believe that our diverse congregation has much to offer one another and our wider community, but we recognise that being a very mixed group of people can make it harder to communicate a simple and coherent message. Similarly, offering a mixed ecology of worship can be



very appealing for some who enjoy the wide expression of Anglican worship, but it is arguably harder for new people to 'catch on' to the underpinning message of the Gospel when it is expressed in a wider variety of ways across the differing services.

A strength that has become apparent as a result of the Covid pandemic is the willingness of the church family to adapt and accommodate in order to continue worshipping together meaningfully, even though this has meant a reduction in the *number* of services and an increase in the *variety* of services offered on a Sunday morning.

Unfulfilled Potential

One of the things we are acutely aware of is our lack of significant engagement with the three primary schools in our parish (but we have recently applied and been accepted to be Bubble Church pilot church so that's a great step on our journey towards better engagement with children and young families). There are also virtually no touch points between the hall users and the worshipping community, and this seems such a wasted opportunity.



As a Christian community we are in the unusual position in the deanery of being generally relaxed and welcoming anyone from all backgrounds, orientations and mental health needs. The huge variety of members currently active in our church reflects this. We feel this makes us distinctive but are open to ideas to take the church further forward in this area.

Due to a variety of reasons, very little missional work has taken place in the parish. It is densely populated, there are businesses in the parish too, and sadly we have not been able to engage meaningfully with most of the people who live and work locally.

Community links

We are mindful that hundreds of hall users cross our threshold every month and whilst the church complex is a valued resource in the community, we know that we could do more to build links and relationships with our hall users and we are looking for ways to achieve this.

We have strong links with one of the local food banks and the congregation have been very generous in their support of this. We also support Church Army, Maidstone Churches' Winter Shelter and the Street Pastors, not just financially but also in practical ways.

We visit the local care home, and one of our members is responsible for organising the School Uniform bank which operates from the church complex. We also have members who are Wildlife Trust volunteers and school governors.

We are regularly used as a polling station for local and national elections.

Nurture and Evangelism

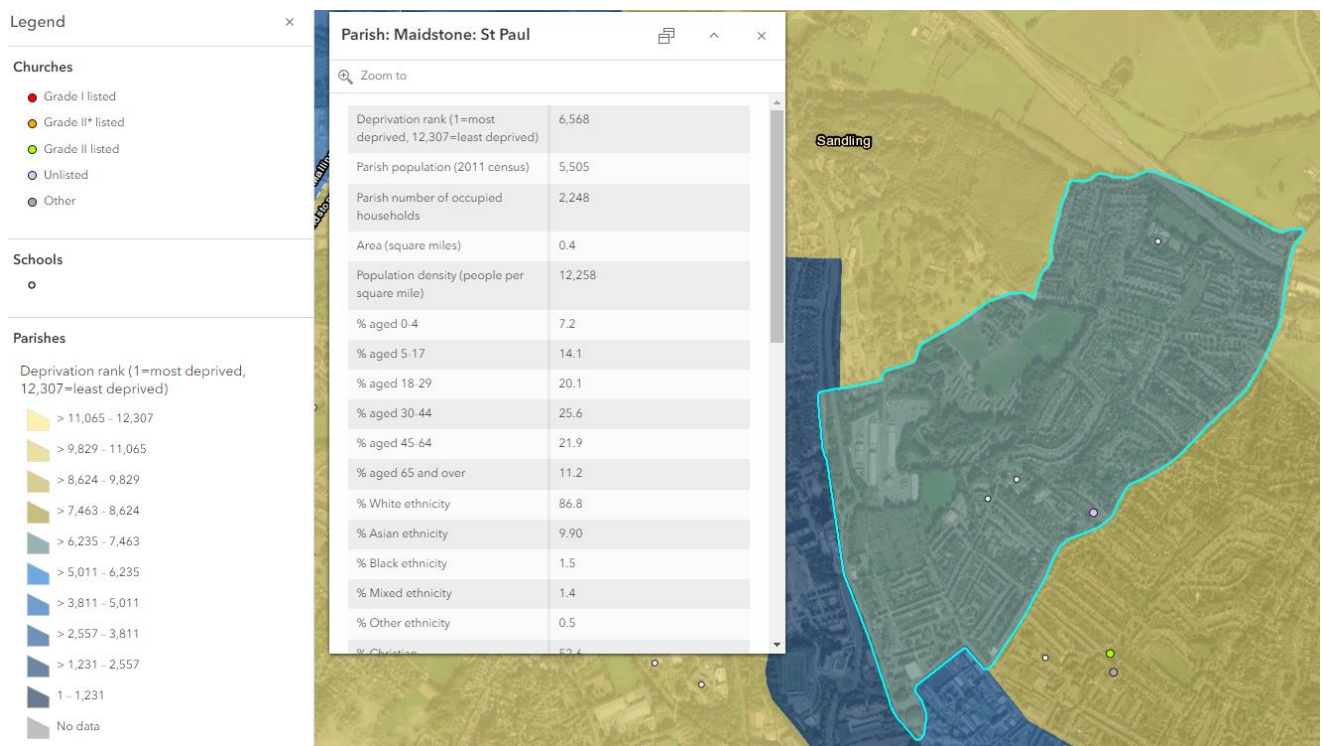
The quality of teaching is important to our worshipping community. We like to learn from the Bible and look for ways to apply this knowledge in our day to day lives. But how to deepen discipleship is a challenge for us given the overstretched ministry and lay teams. We would like to be in a position to offer far more to our members to equip them to spread the Gospel message through their words and actions in their Monday to Saturday lives. This has to be intentional, well-resourced and part of a wider strategy which at the moment, we are not in a position to consider.

Schools

There are three primary schools in the parish, none of which are Church schools. Since the pandemic, there has been very little engagement with these schools and addressing this is something we would like to prioritise. There are no secondary schools in the parish.

Parish geography

The parish lies between the town centre (with two mainline stations) and the M20 motorway. We are



an hour from London and 40 minutes from Canterbury. There is a nature reserve almost on our doorstep, and the Kent Downs, an area of outstanding natural beauty, is ten minutes' walk away.

Demographic and Social geography

Maidstone is the county town of Kent. It is a growing town which is changing from a mainly white, British background to a more mixed community, including people from Eastern Europe and further afield. There is also a growing BAME presence, many people having moved from London after the pandemic when living in the capital became less important because many people are now able to work largely from home.

Our parish is a mixed neighbourhood of affluent, leafy roads and more densely packed streets of Victorian terraced housing with some levels of deprivation. We have one Care Home in the parish.

Issues and Concerns

St. Paul's has registered as an Eco Church and is represented on the Deanery Environment Group. We are committed to finding ways to mitigate climate change within and around our premises, and encourage prayer for the environment in intercessions and the weekly Prayer Diary. Wherever possible, creation care is referenced in sermons to help people understand the impact of human action and behaviour on our world, and to challenge them to think of things that they could do to make a difference.



Although we have seen some modest growth in numbers over the last two years, we feel that we are at a critical stage in the life of our church and are seeking to be led by someone who is willing and able to build on our small successes and help us to become the church we believe that we can be.

The Team at St. Paul's

The ministry team consists of the part-time, non-stipendiary Assistant Curate (who is also a Minister in Secular Employment) priested July 2022, an ALM Worship Leader, an ALM Pastoral Assistant, and a lay Café Worship team. There is a pastoral care team, and a small group of intercessors and readers.

We have one part-time (paid) parish administrator who prepares the PowerPoint for the services (which is projected on to screens), sends out the weekly email update and maintains the website. She also looks after hall hire and is the first contact for occasional offices.



We have a part-time (paid) cleaner who conscientiously cleans the church and halls, and who is flexible with her work pattern to accommodate the needs of the building and its users.

All the other roles in the church are carried out by a small but dedicated team of volunteers. Tasks include groundskeeping and minor maintenance, tea/coffee rota after church, flower arranging, music, preparation of children's activities, and much more.



Worship Pattern

We recognise the variety of images of God in the Bible and the different traditions that have developed since the time of the early church. Our worship embraces a spectrum of ecclesiology, although our theology inclines towards the liberal and inclusive. The sacraments are important to most, though not all, of our worshipping congregation. We currently hold a service at 10.00am on Sundays, with a regular pattern throughout the month. First Sundays are Café Church, second Sundays are All-Age Communion, third Sundays are 'Experimental' (with involvement from members of the congregation and/or other Christian organisations), fourth Sundays are a formal Holy Communion, and fifth Sundays are decided on an ad hoc basis. Within this pattern, we have Celtic worship from time to time and have recently held a 'pet service'. The congregation of St. Paul's has a tradition of being willing to embrace new ideas and this is reflected in the diversity of worship we offer.

We arrange for home communion for those unable to attend in person. Sunday services are broadcast via Zoom, but we recognise that this is not an ideal medium for those wishing to engage meaningfully in worship. We would like to explore a better online offer as this could support members who can't always attend due to work commitments, ill-health or age.

Life of the Church

We have a lively prayer life at St. Paul's, co-ordinated by the ALM Pastoral Assistant, although it is mostly a small group of people who are active in this way. It would be good to build on this and find ways to encourage the wider congregation to pray more corporately as well as privately.

We have a Social Committee who look after events at church, whether they are for fundraising purposes, outreach into the community or simply for the congregation to get to know one another more fully. St. Paul's Fellowship meets monthly, and the purpose of this group is to help overcome loneliness and promote general well-being. Mother's Union and the Craft Group also meet regularly.

There is a very active Home Group who study the Bible, sing and pray together, and encourage one another in their faith. We're keen to find a way to establish new Home Groups who could do the same thing.



We endeavour to keep in touch with our worshipping community, hall users and the wider community by a variety of means. A weekly update is available by e-mail, as hard copy (in church and taken to those without electronic access) and on the church website. The website is a vital means of keeping everyone up to date and of passing on notices and news and is expertly managed by our Parish administrator. Importantly there is a designated email link to our Parish Safeguarding Officer. Church members also support each other using a church WhatsApp™ group.

Occasional Offices

We have a fair number of baptisms as well as funerals, both in the church and at the local crematorium, but very few weddings. As we are a modern building with no bell tower, graveyard, choir or lych-gate, many couples from the parish choose to explore their qualifying connections elsewhere.

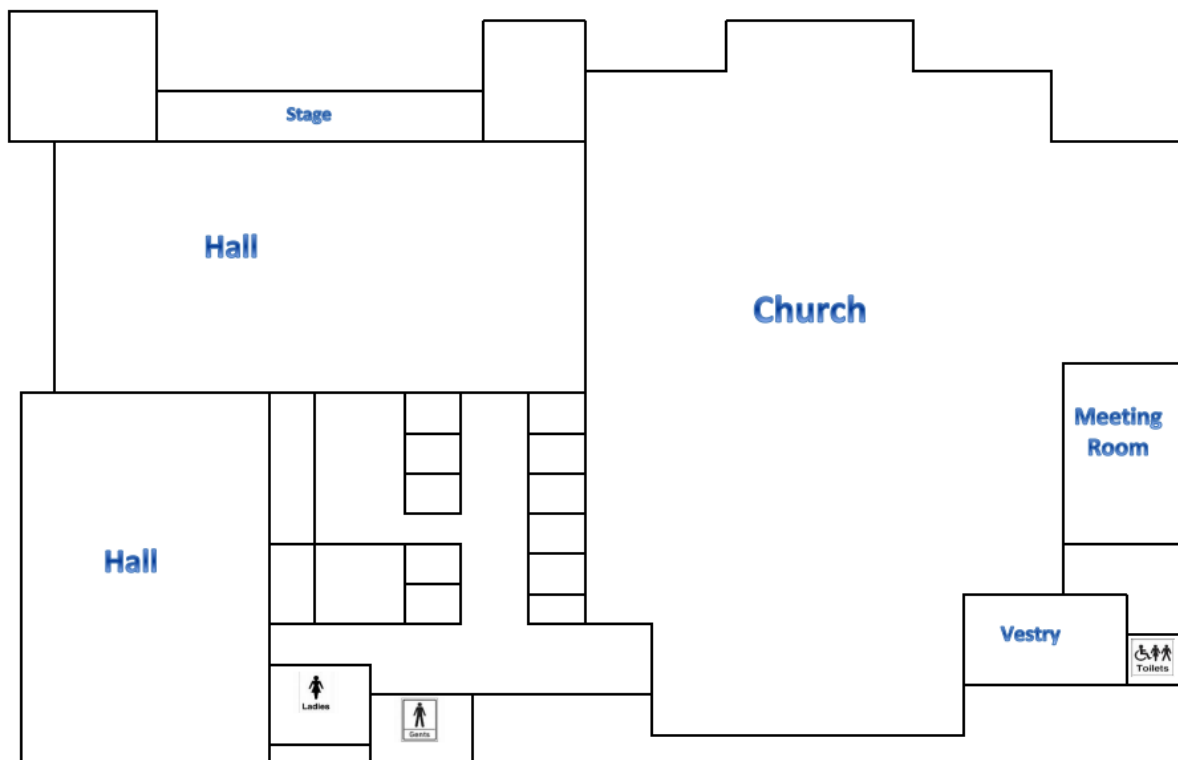
Finances

Our annual accounts show that we are managing our finances prudently. Our Parish Share is paid in full, and income exceeded expenditure last year by almost £9,000. However, we are not complacent about this and are aware that we need to generate more income to guarantee our financial security. Hall hire is well managed and turnover from this is healthy. We have been creative about accessing grants to support a variety of activities such as the funding of a disabled toilet, but there are maintenance issues looming (such as the replacement of the boiler) for which we will need to raise more money.

Buildings in Church complex

St. Paul's is one of the most modern, best equipped and well-maintained churches in the Deanery. It has a range of meeting rooms of different sizes all interconnected within the church complex. These are well used by a wide range of organisations and therefore fulfil a very important role for the community of north Maidstone and beyond. So far, we have managed to keep our church building in a good state of repair by managing our finances prudently, but as it was completed approximately fifty years ago there are some maintenance issues that may prove to be challenging in the near future unless we can access

some grant funding. The church space itself, whilst architecturally modern with clean lines, benefits from beautiful, abstract, stained glass, a stunning cross and wall hanging behind the altar, and a nave free of pews which makes it a very flexible space.



Maidstone Deanery

Consisting of ten parishes, Maidstone Deanery is formally a 'group ministry'. The breadth of Anglican ecclesiology and theology is represented within the group, and Chapter have recently been working with the diocesan Mission and Growth Advisor on a project called Maidstone Mission Mosaic, an initiative to join up, and add to, the various disparate missional activities in the deanery, with a cohesive underpinning vision for the growth of the kingdom in our town. We have been very proactive with regards to our Mission Action Plan and as a result, have already secured funding for two children and youth workers in the Deanery.