

The Parish Church of St John the Evangelist, Crowborough



Parish Profile 2024

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

- Statement of requirements
- Introduction to the Parish
- Pattern of worship
- Study
- Pastoral Involvement
- Safeguarding
- Children and Families work
- The church hall
- PCC and Finance
- Vicarage

Welcome to the Parish of Saint John the Evangelist, Crowborough. We hope that the following document will introduce this parish as a welcoming community which is focused on the love of Jesus Christ. We aim to share this love with those in the wider community, through our worship, and our involvement with people of all ages. We are a Eucharistic community and need a priest who will lead us as individuals and as a community. The parish is unified around an identity that is rooted in the Catholic tradition of the Church of England. The PCC has decided that voting on a resolution concerning the ministry of women would be unhelpful and unnecessarily divisive at this time.



STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENTS

What we are looking for in a new Priest:

Looking to the future

We wish to see our long-standing pattern of worship in the Catholic Tradition maintained and strengthened. Our main Sunday Mass includes sung liturgy and worship supported by a regular choir and excellent organist, which sustains the faith of many, and attracts others looking for a distinctive Catholic form of worship.

We want to build and develop our work with the families with younger children many of whom have little background experience of church. We have regular contact with up to 30 families, but we hope to encourage more to take part in imaginative and suitable services and to share more in the life of the church

We have a congregation with many gifts and talents many of whom actively support parish life. We want to see the lay members continue to be nurtured and encouraged and for newer members of the church to be able to come forward and offer their time and talents for the church and parish.

It would be good to see more of the church family come to our mid-week Mass, Bible studies in Advent and Lent and other spiritual activities, so that we all grow and share in our faith journey.

Therefore, we would welcome:

- A priest firmly rooted in the modern Catholic tradition of the Church of England, with a clear understanding of mission, and a vision for the future of the Church both locally and universally, whose own life is rooted in prayer, the Eucharist and the sacraments of the Church.
- A caring person pastorally, who will build on the firm understanding of “community”, one who relates to people in a variety of settings, and is willing to engage in a range of activities.
- A priest who has the energy and enthusiasm to continue the work with St John’s CE Primary School, teachers, parents and children, to introduce and develop the Christian faith to the children, encouraging them to become part of the Church community.
- A priest who will work with our young families, encouraging parents and children to grow in faith and become committed Christians. Someone who will make Christian life and worship exciting and challenging, and a priority in day-to-day life.
- Someone who can empathise with people at all stages of their faith journey, recognising strengths and weaknesses, and enabling people to use their talents and develop their gifts.
- A good teacher of the Catholic Faith as the Church of England has received it, who by good teaching and spiritual guidance, can help us all to develop our understanding of the Christian faith.

What we can offer a new Priest

- Regular Sunday attendance is around 50 at our main 10am service and we also have a smaller faithful congregation at our 8am Mass. However, on major festivals this number rises considerably.
- A strong and committed church community at St John's, where the laity are willing to play an active part in mission and outreach, as well as pastoral care and community involvement.
- The church calendar has a growing number of high-quality music concerts performed by highly talented members of the congregation and often raising money for charity. In addition, we have a number of social events where our wider congregation can meet up and enjoy good fellowship.
- A beautiful and well-cared for building for worship, together with a modern church hall which enables us to reach out into the community.
- Excellent relationships with the church school, through regular school worship in church, proactive church governors, and lay involvement in listening to the children read etc.
- A four bed-roomed vicarage next to the church, on the edge of the forest and within reach of the town centre.
- This is offered as a 0.5 post

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARISH

The parish is on the outskirts of the town of Crowborough, a town of around 21,000 inhabitants. The Parish of St John's having a population of some 2,300. The church is situated on the edge of The Ashdown Forest, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and was originally the daughter church of the ancient parish of Withyham St Michael's.

In 1839 the patron's wife (Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr, who had sympathies with the Oxford Movement) founded the church of Withyham St John the Evangelist. The village of Withyham lies about four miles north and Countess De La Warr built the church of Withyham St John's to serve the southernmost part of the parish in an area known as Crowborough – at the time a small hamlet. She had also created St John's School, adjoining vicarage (now incorporated into the main school buildings) and almshouses for local women.

The church was from the start a place of Anglo-Catholic worship. St John's is an almost exact copy of St Mary and St Nicholas Littlemore. St John's was at that time at the forefront of the Oxford Movement, and one of the first churches in the Church of England to have a stone altar. That catholic tradition has been maintained throughout its history. Later, in the 1870s, the church became its own ecclesiastical parish and as such was Crowborough's first parish church.





In 1994 the church was renamed, through an Order of Privy Council, to become the Parish of St John the Evangelist, Crowborough. The church, a quite remarkable building situated in a clearing in the forest, is hidden from view and has an immediate impact on all who enter its doors.

It is from the outside a simple stone structure but inside it is beautifully decorated with a carved reredos focused on the scene of the Nativity, striking stained-glass windows by Charles Eamer Kempe and a gilded image of Our Lady by Sir Ninian Comper. The chancel was redecorated in 2020; the chancel arch painted and the “Annunciation” cleaned recently; and our hope is to do further work on the nave as soon as funds allow. All major items highlighted as urgent in the quinquennial report have been addressed.

PATTERN OF WORSHIP

From its beginnings, St John’s has stood strongly in the Catholic tradition of the Church of England and the pattern of worship reflects this, while also being open to liturgical change. On Sundays the 8am Low Mass follows the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The congregation is a mix of age groups and an important part of the St John’s community.

The principal Sunday service is the 10am Sung Parish Mass, the congregation is very broad in terms of ages and traditions, with a regular attendance of 50 to 60. In addition, we have a Mass on Wednesdays at 10am.

An excellent choir is further augmented once a month and on special occasions, and a junior choir sing once a month, trained and rehearsed by our part time choir master. These are supported by a superb organist and a very fine organ. The laity participate as readers and a number of the congregation are trained as Eucharistic Ministers. There is a team of loyal altar servers.

Members of our congregation are happy to give lifts to those less mobile parishioners, and refreshments in the hall afterwards gives everyone the opportunity to meet socially. Whenever possible festivals are celebrated with an evening Mass. Lent and Advent have been marked by a teaching course. Holy Week this year was marked by a good congregation each day, culminating in 135 people at the 10am Mass on Easter Sunday.



Study

We are very aware of a great need to develop our understanding of the Faith and in recent years a number of courses have been followed, including the Diocesan Lent courses, and the Church of England Pilgrim course. The new Parish Hall made it possible to include lunch as part of the Lent course, and to invite participants from other parishes. The pandemic made us look at other methods and we had some success with introducing courses on Zoom. This made it possible to include people for whom it was difficult to get to church. Much thought needs to be given to developing this aspect of our life further, and making the most of a variety of approaches.

PASTORAL INVOLVEMENT

St John's has a strong tradition of supporting others within the church community and beyond. One member of the PCC has responsibility for keeping in contact with those of the congregation who are frail or have difficulties getting to church. Transport is organized for those who need it, both for the Sunday 10am Mass and for the Wednesday Mass. Communion is taken on a regular basis by Eucharistic ministers to those who are housebound. There is a team of volunteers, who always go in pairs and are all DBS checked. Many of the congregation are also involved in visiting within the community on an informal basis. One of the local Undertakers runs a "Bereavement group" using the church hall, and a number of the congregation are involved with this.



Keeping the church grounds tidy and cared for has resulted in a working party who meet when needed, not only to do the manual work but also get to know each other, often drawing in some of the young parents, encouraging them to become part of the community. Because the church and the churchyard are surrounded by woodland, conservation is important and the whole area is managed by a member of the PCC, ensuring that rare plants etc. are protected, in an environmental way. We have been supported by the Sussex Woodland Trust, as well as a grant from Withyham Council.



Other groups show their care for the church through flower-arranging, cleaning, and sacristy work.

Social events are an important part of life at St John's, including such things as a cream tea for the Coronation. Shrove Tuesday used to be Quiz night, but this year became Bingo; Concerts and Recitals have provided excellent entertainment and a parish Garden party is always popular. Coffee is served on Sunday after the 10am Mass, and after the Mass on Wednesdays. Many events begin as fund-raising but end up as tremendous social events.



SAFEGUARDING

St John's considers safeguarding to be of paramount importance in all its undertakings. It appears on the agenda of every PCC meeting and relevant information is communicated to all those who attend the church.

In November 2019 we were awarded the Simple Quality Protects Certificate by the diocese and congratulated on the standard of our evidence. One of our wardens also acts as our Safeguarding Officer and another leader manages the DBS checks. All those working with children and those visiting vulnerable adults have undertaken C0 and C1 training. Church leaders and those with PTO status have completed C2 training. This training is regularly reviewed and renewed after 3 years.

Relevant policies and information can be found on our website and hard copies of all safeguarding documentation are filed and stored securely. We can never become complacent regarding any safeguarding issue and to that end we remain vigilant at all times.



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WORK

The parish has seen a growth in the number of families moving into the area, with St John's Primary School and the Pre-School being popular choices for parents. There has been a rise in the number of Baptisms at St John's and Sunday School and Family Services are well attended. At Harvest, Christmas and Easter we have had a full church at the Family Services and our Christmas and Easter workshops have been very popular.



There is a Family Service on the first Sunday of each month usually at 9am before the main Mass at 10am. Sunday School (Sunday Club) runs on the 4th Sunday in the church hall at 9am, allowing families and the older children to go into church mass afterwards. At Easter there is a Good Friday workshop and service, and a Christmas workshop in early December with a Family Crib Service on Christmas Eve.



Family Services and Sunday Club are planned and run by the ALM Children and Families Co-Ordinator with an experienced couple and a small team of adult helpers. Others from the congregation lend additional help and support for the workshops and major events. Both Family Services and the Sunday Club sessions have liturgical worship, teaching from the Bible and craft, quizzes and games.

We are very fortunate to have a woodland area set up so we can hold both outdoor family services and Sunday Club sessions when the weather permits. Our outdoor sessions are very popular with our families.

We have developed a Junior Choir made up of children from St John's School and also a few who have moved into secondary education. They rehearse with the Choir Director once a month and the children sing at the 10am Mass every third Sunday. There are currently six choristers but there is a recruitment drive each year to increase the size of the choir.



Links with St John's CE Primary School and Pre-School:

There has been a good relationship between the church and St John's CE Primary, located behind the church site, for a number of years, fostered by previous and the most recent incumbent. The importance of links with the school is something which many of the congregation share. A number of the younger families have children at the school and the Pre-School (which uses the Reading Room which belongs to the parish, and the church hall) and it is encouraging to see their commitment to coming to family services and church events in growing numbers.

The Headteacher writes "I have every confidence that the parish will make an excellent choice (of Incumbent) and would only reiterate that the person has skills or knowledge making them able to continue to work with the school in creating a relationship between the school and parish. Being flexible to the needs and demands of the school and an affinity with children and staff would also be useful!"

There is a strong contingent from the main congregation acting as Foundation governors (six plus the Incumbent as Ex-Officio) including the Chair. Their contribution and leadership is greatly valued by the Headteacher and the staff. The ALM Families Co-Ordinator is the Chair of the governing body and will be sharing oversight of SIAMS with the Headteacher. PCC and the school governors have adopted a joint Church/School Agreement which is reviewed every year. In addition, some members of the congregation go in on a voluntary basis to hear children read or help out with class activities or they support major school events. Some of the parents also act as Sunday Club leaders or helpers.



The school has a regular time of collective worship each Wednesday morning in church led by the Incumbent or the Children's and families Co-ordinator who also visit the school frequently and join in assemblies and share in the spiritual life of the school. The church is also used for the Christmas Carol service and the Year 6 Leavers Assembly. On some special occasions the school choir has joined an all-age Mass at church. This is an area that could be developed in parallel with

developing the church Junior Choir. It is also hoped that the links with school will be enhanced by the on-going work of the Children and Families Co-Ordinator.

Perhaps the excellence of St John's school is best summed up in the SIAMS report of 2017:

"The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's CE Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding".



The Church Hall



2016 saw the completion of the building of a new church hall. Designed to sit alongside the church building and within the forest, it now provides much needed facilities for both the parish, and the local community. Much effort and hard work had gone into the raising of the money needed for this project.



Many fund-raising events were organised, and many generous donations were received, a reflection of the dedication of the whole congregation. As a result the hall is in constant use: from coffee following the Eucharist on Sunday morning, to social events such as quiz evenings and harvest lunches, together with space for study groups and meetings, Sunday club activities and workshops, the parish is able to enjoy the modern facilities.



Many in the local community have also taken advantage of those facilities, from a bereavement group, to yoga and Pilates classes, to singing lessons and children's parties. The hall plays an important part in enabling us to make contact with the local community, and introduce them to the life and witness of the church community. For the last two

years lettings have paid for the running costs of the hall in full.

PCC AND FINANCE

The Parochial Church Council is made up of 12 members, who cover various aspects of church life, as well as having a variety of experience in the wider world. Meeting at least six times per year they lend their support and expertise to discussion of all aspects of church life.

Much hard work and very generous giving over recent years has resulted in the completion of several major projects, the building of the church hall and the installation of a new heating system in the church, work on the drainage and a heat pump for the hall. Fund raising events which drew people together and a number of large donations, together with some grants, meant that the life of the community could be developed and enhanced. At the same time the Parish share has always been met. Charitable giving takes the form of support for a number of organisations, including the Crowborough Food Bank; Parkinsons UK; the Children's Society, Crisis and the Bishop's Lent project. The Historic Churches Trust also benefit from our participation in "Ride and Stride". We believe that money given to St John's should be used to enable the spread of the gospel and the mission of the Church. The PCC member responsible for "Stewardship" has recently done a lot of work to bring more people into the Parish Giving Scheme, which the majority of our congregation now use, and to increase the use of Gift Aid; a new card reader has been installed to help with one-off giving and meet the requirements of "the cashless society". Our Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer are always researching how we can best manage church finances during the current inflationary cycle. Full details of our accounts can be seen with the Annual Report.

THE VICARAGE

St John's vicarage sits in a woodland setting and is within a minute's walk of the church and 4 minutes' walk from St John's Primary School. It was built in the 1950s and is a pleasant family home. Downstairs there is a kitchen, utility area, study, cloakroom and living room overlooking and opening onto, a substantial garden. Upstairs there are 4 bedrooms with some storage and a separate bathroom and toilet. There is a good-sized garage and parking space in front of the house for 2/3 cars.

The garden is well stocked and leads into a small paddock. As St John's nestles in the Ashdown Forest wildlife visit regularly; including deer, foxes, badgers, rabbits and pheasants.

Crowborough High Street is approximately 6 minutes away by car and a 15-minute walk. It is served by 3 supermarkets all with adequate free parking. There are a few independent shops but Tunbridge Wells, 7 miles away, has a wealth of retail establishments. Crowborough is linked to London by Southern Rail; and to Tunbridge Wells and Brighton by bus. The town is served by 2 excellent medical centres which offer a range of services, together with a small hospital which offers a minor injuries facility. There is a good 11-18 school in the town and several grammar schools and a large Church of England secondary school in Tunbridge Wells.



SUMMARY

St John's is a vibrant, thriving and welcoming church community based on a foundation of faith and prayer. We are now ready for the next chapter in the life of St John's under the leadership of our next incumbent.

We pray the Lord will direct the appropriate priest to St John the Evangelist Church in 2025.

For further information please visit our website on: <https://www.stjohnscrowborough.co.uk>