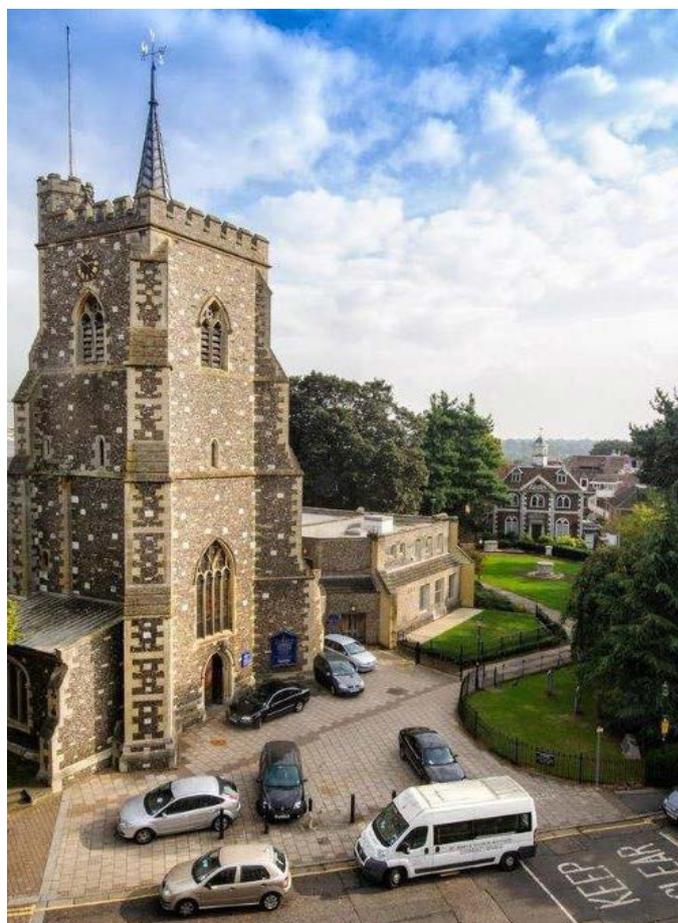


With God's help, could you be our Vicar?

Naturally, we want our next Vicar to be someone who walks closely with God, is excited by the message of the Gospel, loves and cares for each member of their flock, and nurtures everyone's faith.

But could you also:

- Set out and take forward a vision that will enthuse each member of our very diverse congregation
- Reinvigorate our work with children, youth and younger adults, so that the witness of St Mary's may continue into future generations
- Inspire and lead our mission to the town, taking full advantage of the opportunities for community engagement and evangelism offered by the reordered church
- As 'Vicar of Watford', take the Gospel into the civic institutions of the town and be respected for your contribution to the Watford community.



If you sense that God might be calling you to us, read on.

“St Mary's has a superb track record in supporting the least, the last and the lost“

New Hope

Who are we?

We are an inclusive, evangelical church, committed to Bible-based worship and mission, situated on the High Street in the heart of Watford and wanting to share our love for Jesus with our town. Our congregation reflects Watford's diverse population; each Sunday, we welcome worshippers from up to 20 different countries. We believe God is calling us to become a truly inclusive church - a church that is a 'house of prayer for all nations' - a church known as a safe place, where all who come through our doors, irrespective of social or economic status, age, race, disability, gender or sexual orientation, will feel accepted and welcomed and will encounter, through that welcome and through our worship, the presence and love of Jesus Christ.

It is an exciting time for St Mary's. God is challenging us to understand and put into practice what true inclusivity means for the life of the church and its worship. Our first steps in that journey have included inviting members of our different ethnic communities to contribute distinctively to our services, for example by saying the Collect in their first language as well as English. But much larger steps will be needed; traditional Anglican forms of worship are not accessible to everyone and we look to a new Vicar to lead us into new forms of worship.





Another aspect of this journey with God is that our efforts to reflect our diversity in the leadership of the church and to engage everyone in its activities have so far had only mixed success. As a consequence, we are not realising the potential of our congregation and need to find the means of doing this if we are properly to fulfil our mission to the town. We have had good support for lunches where members of our community may enjoy a wide variety of foods but need to develop our awareness of different forms of participation and commitment.

Although we have experienced a decline in attendance since the Covid pandemic, our numbers have now stabilised with our Sunday morning service (at present our only Sunday service) having a regular attendance of 70-80 with significantly more at Easter and other festivals when the church is filled with music and praise.

Most of our congregation live outside the parish – we are a ‘gathered’ church. Because we are not a ‘local’ church, we are not a favoured venue for weekday activities for children and young people, such as the uniformed organisations, and despite having a Children and Families Worker for some years, running our own toddler group and Pre-School and there being two infant/primary schools in the parish, the participation of these age-groups has declined, with only eight children regularly attending our Sunday School and no provision for the over 14s. This is a matter of great concern and one that we wish to address.

This Profile has been informed by extensive consultation with the congregation including a questionnaire completed by some 60 respondents. The consultation also established that the great majority of our congregation, across ethnicities, supported the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith.

Location and parish

Our location gives us unique opportunities for promoting the Gospel. We are the only church in the retail centre of Watford; literally thousands of shoppers and workers walk past the church daily; other residents of the town, on the margins of society, congregate in our churchyard. Every day, people seek rest and a time of quiet within our ancient walls.

“St Mary’s presents an image of being a place of calm and a welcoming, inclusive place of worship.”

Elected Mayor

That location means, however, that we are separated by the Watford ring road and by an open space from the main residential areas of the parish. Consequently, St Mary's is not widely recognised by those living there as 'their' church. The changing nature of retail, though, is bringing new residential developments in other areas of the parish. These typically have younger residents from different backgrounds than in the older areas and offer distinctive mission opportunities that we would wish to take up. Our central location also means that we attract many new arrivals to the town. Some stay; others are transient, moving on after a time.



Community engagement

Our church building was beautifully reordered in 2018/9 and now offers a distinctive, flexible venue for community events, thus drawing into the church people who would not otherwise think of entering. We see it as a key asset in widening our links with the local community; partnering local organisations over events in the church has enabled us to break down barriers and show how our faith is reflected in our concern for our neighbours and for creation.

We have seen God at work in these initiatives. We have welcomed Watford residents who have never before been into our (or perhaps any) church, many of whom have commented how valued and affirmed they have felt and how they have been accepted without judgement. Those of little faith have said their faith had increased and those with no faith found us a 'revelation'. This has been a joy to us. We have begun to share our faith with new friends made through these initiatives, most recently by inviting them to our Carols by Candlelight service, and indeed inviting some to read at that service. All this encourages us to go further in realising the vision that underpinned the reordering: the creation of not only a worship space for the 21st century but also a real focus and hub for the community of Watford through which people may come to Christ.



Demonstrating our concern to preserve God's creation has also strengthened our community links. Following a high-profile service in 2023 in which we were presented with an EcoChurch silver award, this year we held a day conference on how individuals can respond to climate change which involved 14 local environmental groups and was attended by some 90 participants. We are also partnering the Borough Council in initiatives to improve biodiversity in the churchyard.

Our initiatives on climate change stemmed from our 'Connect' Group on Current Affairs which has sought over the years to bring Scriptural insights to bear on many contemporary issues, informing our prayer and worship and stimulating new initiatives. To take another example, the creation of a 'hardship fund' within the church followed study of the causes of the cost-of-living crisis.



How we see our next Vicar

We are strong in faith but need to grow in understanding and in leadership. Hence we seek someone who is:

- passionate about living out the message and life of Jesus, inspiring everyone to know and experience more of that life
- a 'people person' who relates to and cares for everyone
- an enabler who recognises and nurtures each person's abilities



We are a church on the move, changing in response to the realities of the present and confident in the future. We seek someone who, under God's guidance, will lead us into that future, who:

- can discern the opportunities and challenges that are distinctive to St Mary's through its diversity, the demographics of its congregation and the parish, and its location
- can help us develop and communicate a vision for the church, including for growth, and a strategy for achieving it that engages and makes full use of the abilities of all of our congregation
- and in this strategy, gives particular attention to attracting and engaging younger age groups so that St Mary's may be properly representative of its wider community, more able to interact with it, and develops its future leadership.



*“To help others discover their calling,
delegate effectively, raise up leaders and be a
church on fire for God”*

Member of St Mary's

We are in the heart of Watford, uniquely able through our location and our history to take the Good News into the institutions of the town. So we seek a Vicar who in addition:

- is missional in helping us take the Gospel into the wider Watford community and in growing in confidence in our evangelism and working with other Christian bodies in witness to the town
- will be a Christian influence on the life of the town, notably by participating in community and civic bodies, and respected for their contribution
- can interact effectively with the leaders of other faiths and will support the strong inter-faith relationships that exist in Watford
- has the wisdom to find an appropriate balance between the demands of these activities and those of the church community.



In conclusion - our promise to you

Thank you for reading this Profile. We hope that you have been stimulated and excited by it and we pray that you will know God's guidance as you consider whether you can rise to the challenges of being Vicar of St Mary's, Watford. We recognise that this is not easy; it is far from a conventional parish ministry. We recognise also that its challenges can only be successfully addressed through a partnership between Vicar and congregation, together seeking and taking forward God's intentions for the church and its role in the wider community of Watford.

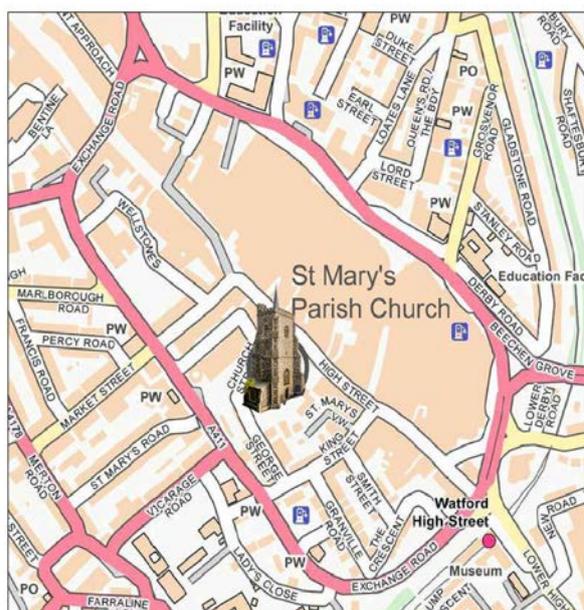
So, as the people of St Mary's, we pledge that we will give you love, prayer and support in order that, under your leadership, we will all grow in Christ and, together, may serve our church community, the parish and town.

“St Mary's signifies the presence of God for over a millennium in the very heart of our Town and is a public witness to God's faithfulness”

One YMCA

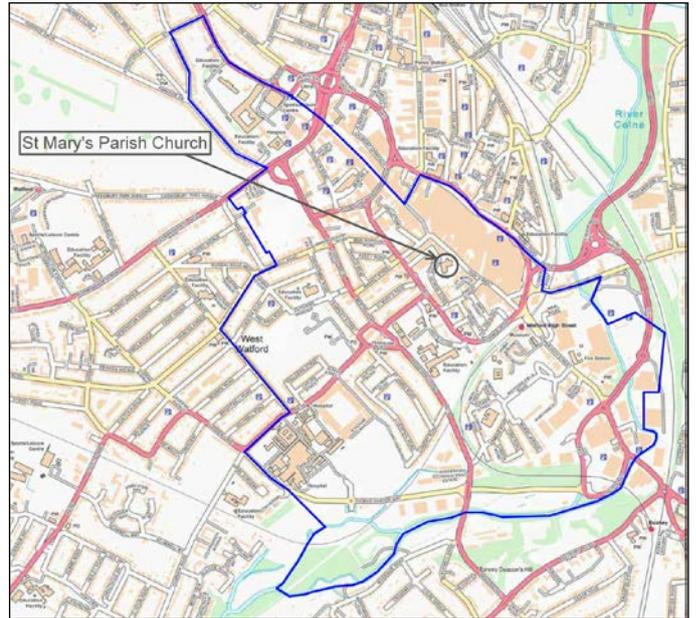
Appendices

1. Parish
2. Worship
3. Outreach and Evangelism
4. Staffing
5. PCC and Governance
6. Fellowship and Communications
7. Finances
8. Buildings (including Vicarage)



1. Parish

The Benefice consists of the single Parish of St Mary's, centred on the ancient Parish Church of Watford – the Vicar enjoys the title of 'Vicar of Watford'. Geographically, the Parish is split approximately equally between the central retail and leisure district of the town and areas of housing. It is one of eight parishes within the area of Watford Borough Council, the others being primarily residential. The church's prominent position on the High Street is a strategic asset.



Around 10,000 people live in the Parish, with new developments bringing a different demographic to the area. The main residential area consists largely of late 19th century, mostly terraced, housing. Almost all the new housing takes the form of small flats.

Watford has a population of around 90,000 with a strong representation of minority ethnic communities, most of whom live in the residential areas of the Parish and adjoining central areas. It is a relatively prosperous regional retail and commercial centre, some 20 miles north-west of the centre of London and just inside the M25. There is considerable local employment but many residents commute to central London: from Watford Junction (20 minutes to Euston) or the Metropolitan Line Underground station (40 minutes to Baker Street). House prices reflect the proximity to London.

Our congregation reflects Watford's diversity, with currently around 30% of regular worshippers being from ethnic minorities. Around 50% of the congregation are residents of central Watford where income levels tend to be lower than in other areas of the town.

Within the Parish are:

- Watford General Hospital (which is awaiting funding for rebuild).
- The Peace Hospice
- Vicarage Road football ground (Watford FC)
- Watford Town Hall (currently being redeveloped to house the Watford Museum and an entrepreneurs' hub as well as council offices)
- Watford Public Library
- The Palace Theatre (professional repertory)
- West Herts College (FE)
- A large One YMCA hostel

- three infant/primary schools
- Watford Grammar School for Girls (the Vicar is ex-officio a Governor of this school and of the Watford Grammar School for Boys)
- Watford Police Station
- Watford Magistrates Court



Within the Parish also are Watford's principal Roman Catholic Church, a Baptist Church and several independent evangelical churches. Reflecting the multi-cultural nature of the town and particularly its central area, the Parish also includes Watford's central mosque and a Sikh temple.

2. Worship

Sunday Services

We have a single Sunday service at 10.30am. Evening services, held at 6.30pm before the pandemic, were replaced with a monthly 'Encounter' service, taking various forms, at 5.30pm. This has become occasional during the Vacancy owing to lack of resource. Attendance at the morning service is typically 70-80; and at the Encounter service was 20-25, some of whom would not have attended the morning service. A few members participate in the 10.30 service by Zoom.

Our Sunday worship uses a mix of traditional hymns and worship songs accompanied on most Sundays by organ and piano. Our Music Group plays on the third Sunday of the month. Our choir of a dozen or more enhances our Holy Communion services when all, including visitors, are invited to receive the bread and wine. We benefit from having an enthusiastic choirmaster who brings the best out of everyone and a talented volunteer organist. The address is usually around 12-15 minutes.

While broadly following the Lectionary with its annual pattern of services, we encourage variety in the forms of service used and from comments received in response to the congregational questionnaire, this variety is appreciated. However, as noted in the Profile, there are indications that some find the language of Anglican worship stretching and we need to explore how this can be made more accessible while keeping the essence of our worship and teaching. Some responses also questioned whether the times of services were suited to modern lifestyles.

A variety of approach is particularly evident in our monthly 'Worship for All' services which are led by a team of lay members of the congregation who encourage, and achieve, a high degree of congregational participation. These lively and vibrant services are opportunities for the whole family of God at St Mary's, young and old, to learn from each other and grow together.

St Mary's has no Readers but encourages lay participation in worship, including at times giving the address. Three Lay Leaders of Worship have been approved, with more in training. This high degree of lay participation began in the 1990s and has been actively supported by all incumbents since. Several of these lay participants have gone on to ordination and we have two ordinands at present. Currently, owing to a lack of volunteers, we do not have Prayer Teams available to pray with individuals after Sunday Services.



Baptism (infant or adult), which usually takes place in the main Sunday morning service, is offered to members of the congregation and to all who live in the parish, irrespective of their church connections. The number of baptisms and funerals each year is typically in the low single figures. Owing to access problems on a Saturday, few weddings are held in the church.

Seasonal services

In recent years, services to mark Creationtide have focussed on the practical and ethical challenges of climate change. Guest speakers who are experts in this field led and preached. In addition, there were Harvest services led by the Worship for All team.

Apart from Christmas services, services on High Days that do not fall on a Sunday, such as Ash Wednesday, are not well attended.

Other services

St Mary's is often the venue for services which involve a wider range of the local population. These include the Founders' Day services of the Grammar Schools, school carol concerts, the Remembrance Day service and significant memorial or funeral services.

Our Remembrance Sunday service is a civic event in which the Elected Mayor of Watford ¹, a committed Christian, and the Member of Parliament participate. In the afternoon, there is a civic

1. Watford has an executive Elected Mayor, a position similar in concept to the Mayors of London and the West Midlands, but with more restricted powers. The present Mayor is in his second four-year term of office, The Chairman of the Council continues to be elected by Councillors annually.

procession from St Mary's to the town's War Memorial where an open-air service is held. The Vicar often gives the address.



Children's Activities

Children's activities take place in the Church Centre in parallel with the Sunday morning service (when it is not Worship for All). These follow a varied programme of Bible stories, suitable for all abilities and personalities, with relevant activities such as games and craft. Three leaders are supported by occasional helpers. Children return to the church for Holy Communion prayers.

Currently, some 14 children in total attend with varying regularity. On any given Sunday, on average four children attend the Scramblers group (age 4-10) and a further four attend the Pathfinders group (age 11-14). Our previous Youth Group did not resume after the pandemic owing to a lack of leaders.



3. Outreach and Evangelism

St Mary's outreach activities

We currently open the church every weekday between 9:30am and 3:00pm and on Saturdays between 9:00am and 2:00pm. Because of our location, each day people enter for quiet prayer, a person to talk to or to look round our historic building. We provide games and craft in a side chapel to encourage people who need a safe and warm space to stay.

Weekly lunch-time concerts in the church have had to be discontinued during the vacancy owing to pressure on staff resources but have potential for growth when re-instated.

Other outreach activities take place in the Church Centre, including:

St Mary's Pre-School: with an OFSTED rating of 'Good', this operates each weekday morning in the Church Centre. It is normally fully subscribed, with currently 27 children from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and five adult staff.

Play Group: This provides a weekly social opportunity for typically ten children under three with their parents and carers, again from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Alpha Groups have taken place, but not recently.

Outreach through use of the church

We believe that events held in the church in partnership with other local organisations with whom we share common values have great potential for putting over the Gospel and showing that we share the concerns of our neighbours.

Two recent events illustrate this:

Proud Watford: In September, we hosted an exhibition of portraits of local people in partnership with Proud Watford. A welcoming event for Proud Watford members, the Elected Mayor, borough councillors etc attracted over 50 people. It was unusual and even a little uncomfortable at first for some of us to see transgender women in the church. Nevertheless, we welcomed them and were embraced – sometimes literally – by them in return. It was a moving moment when God challenged us to venture outside our comfort zone and showed us what was possible if we exercised Jesus's love.

Climate Conference: Watford's first ever Climate Conference, held in the church on 5th October, included talks on the science, theology and ethics of climate change, practical workshops and a concluding networking session. Those attending said that it had been a great learning opportunity, that they had been inspired and that they looked forward to the next one.

“I feel so welcomed, affirmed and loved by St Mary's. It's good to be in a safe space where I can be me and not judged. My faith's been deepened by the Christians I've met from St Mary's and St Albans [Cathedral]”

Transgender woman



“Absolutely brilliant. Well done for organising such a great event. The tone, pace and balance of everything was so good. You really are the green heart of Watford”

A Rocha representative

As noted in the Profile, we have found that our concern over climate change and the initiatives we have taken to address it have strengthened our contact with local community organisations and with the Borough Council, with whom we now have constructive dialogue over the future management of the churchyard (this initiative being termed the 'Green Heart of Watford').

Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy and the Christian community in Watford

The Town Centre Chaplaincy created in 2004 by the then Vicar of St Mary's, takes the Christian message into the High Street and into the businesses and organisations in the town centre. Based at St Mary's and funded by local churches, it employs a full-time Chaplain who leads a team of voluntary assistant chaplains, both ordained and lay, who each have a focus for their activity – the Town Hall, the Police Station, the YMCA, the Atria retail centre, etc. Since its formation, the Board of Trustees has been chaired by the Vicar of St Mary's.



The Chaplaincy organises teams of 'Street Angels' who provide counsel and assistance to young people in the entertainment area of the High Street on Friday and Saturday nights each week.

St Mary's also participates in the activities of two Christian groupings in Watford: Churches Together in Watford and Christians Across Watford and in the Watford Interfaith Group.

St Mary's is recognised as a focus for support for refugees. Currently, the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership is based at the church (our previous Vicar was a Trustee). They run a weekly drop-in session where advice, support and activities can be accessed by refugees in the local area, some of whom are in our congregation. Some church members assist with this. Also, the 'Sunflower Club', which supports refugees from Ukraine, holds events in the Church Centre.

Evangelism

Prior to the pandemic, we took advantage of our location on the High Street to hold Summer in the Square, a series of monthly Saturday afternoon events outside the church. Typically, our musicians

and singers performed, a gospel message was given e.g. using a humorous retelling of a parable, and we would hire a Christian performer or group such as Tough Talk (ex-bouncers etc) to help attract crowds. We would like to reinstate such events but resources have not permitted.

There is scope to develop Meet at the Moon (see Fellowship section) into something more evangelistic e.g. Alpha at the Moon, Church at the Moon and for holding social events (e.g. quiz nights) in that type of setting.

4. Staffing

Church Office: St Mary's employs an Office Administrator and a Facilities Manager, both part-time and on permanent contracts.

The Office Administrator works 10 hours a week. She prepares the various forms of communication with the congregation and handles enquiries and liaison with the Borough Council and the diocese. She also arranges baptisms and funerals

The Facilities Manager works 19.5 hours a week during term time only. She

- is the contact point for individuals and organisations wishing to hire space in the church,
- ensures that users comply with health and safety and safeguarding requirements,
- ensures that the church building is safe for users,
- promotes new hires.

The Facilities Manager's costs are more than covered by the income from the hires that she brings in. With the reduction in the number of people available to open and close the church each day we intend temporarily to employ a part-time Security Officer.

Pre-School: The Pre-School, which is a St Mary's activity under the PCC, employs four members of staff on permanent contracts: a manager (30 hours a week), a deputy manager (24 hours) and two key workers (18.5 hours). A third key worker is an apprentice on a temporary contract. All staff work with the children five mornings a week during term-time but the managers have additional paid-for hours for paperwork and administration.

A recent HR audit, conducted by the diocese, commended St Mary's on its staff management practices.

5. PCC & Governance

The PCC has 12 lay members. It maintains a comprehensive set of policies, guidance, agreements

and procedures which are reviewed and updated regularly. As well as the statutory Standing Committee, the PCC has committees concerned with Finance, Buildings, Staffing, Climate Emergency and the Pre-School. These include non-PCC members with appropriate expertise.

The PCC commenced work on the church's second MAP in late 2023. With the previous Vicar's departure, though, this was not taken further. Some of the main themes that were emerging, such as the need to engage the whole congregation in the life of the church, have been reflected in the Profile. Through the MAP initiative, and inspired by Micah 6:8², the PCC developed the following set of values for St Mary's:

- i. Bible based worship and teaching which acknowledges the greatness and grace of God in Christ
- ii. Diversity in social status, ethnicity etc
- iii. Equality of gender, sexuality, race, culture etc
- iv. Forgiveness and reconciliation
- v. Equality of opportunity/social justice
- vi. The protection of God's creation
- vii. The heritage of our ancient building as a tangible symbol of God's presence in Watford now and over the generations

6. Fellowship and Communications

Six 'Connect' Groups, usually meeting weekly in people's homes and/or on Zoom, study scripture together and support one another in prayer. One of these is Farsi-speaking. Their total membership is around 40 but membership does not overall reflect the ethnic diversity of the congregation. Group leaders choose their own study material. This aspect of the church's life is in need of new thinking and reinvigoration, with renewed support for leaders.

A Current Affairs Connect Group meets occasionally to discuss current issues in the light of Scripture. It has a core membership of 8-10 but attracts others depending on its subject matter. In 2024, it met to discuss the issues in the General Election and also to hear from experience about non-violent direct action. As noted in the Profile, it has been a springboard for action.

The 'Wednesday Fellowship' meets most weeks during the afternoon and arranges occasional day trips. It caters for our older members. The average attendance is eight. These meetings host speakers on diverse topics, as well as being a time for friendship and a cup of tea.

'Meet at the Moon' takes place at the local Moon Under Water pub at least monthly. It is a place for

informal fellowship where newcomers can meet regular church members and where people on the fringes of St Mary's can move closer to the core.

Our central prayer meeting takes place on the first Wednesday evening of the month. It goes by the name of 'CAKE', standing for Come and Know Everything (but which also reflects the cake and sherry provided!). It is the special time when we 'do business with God' and has developed considerably during the vacancy with attendance increasing to 15-25. Each session has several components. We always include a forward look to the month's events and activities, reflect on national and/or international events and have a time for personal requests. The churchwardens and PCC are of the view that they should be transparent and accountable to the congregation and so we share church issues and needs freely for prayer (unless confidential eg safeguarding). Those attending are not put in a situation where they are under any pressure to pray aloud; we emphasise that silent prayer is as valid as spoken prayer. We believe CAKE should be a powerhouse of St Mary's.

As with other week-day activities, participants do not reflect the diversity of our congregation. Individual church members continue to exercise pastoral care although our previous Pastoral Group which oversaw the church's response to practical and caring needs within the congregation has not been re-formed since the pandemic.

Communications

A weekly MailChimp Newsletter is sent to around 150 recipients, with a topical foreword and news of forthcoming events etc. Supplementing this is a Family at St Mary's WhatsApp Group where members of St Mary's give updates on events in their lives and what is happening in the church.

We publish (on-line and in hard copy) a monthly church magazine, St Mary's News, which keeps its readers informed about the life of St Mary's and its people as well as including articles about matters of interest. This is a valuable communication tool, a prayer aid for our community and a means by which those who have moved away from St Mary's can stay in touch with us.

St Mary's maintains a website (www.stmaryswatford.org) and a Facebook page. We are in need of a volunteer to oversee our on-line communications and consequently they are not always as up-to-date as we would like.

The church has the usual notice boards giving details of Sunday services and contact information. We are planning to install a digital notice board, visible in the High Street, on the wall of the Church Office. This will enable us more easily and effectively to provide information about forthcoming events in the church together with appropriate seasonal message.

Through our partnerships with other local organisations, we recently gained direct access to the Editor of the Watford Observer, our main local paper. This resulted in a short article about our conference on climate change appearing in the paper. There is scope to build on this relationship.

7. Finance

St Mary's is blessed with generous giving by its congregation but, like many organisations, we have struggled in recent years to keep pace with inflation, partly because of the decline in membership since the pandemic (although, as noted elsewhere, numbers have now stabilised).

Our Electoral Roll stands at 142 but as a town centre church we have a changing congregation, and this results in changes to giving patterns across the years. With the aim of achieving a steady income with maximum refund of tax through Gift Aid, we encourage pledged giving by Standing Orders. Collections are also taken during services. Notices about how to give by text, together with a card machine, encourage giving by visitors to the church.

In recent years, while always meeting our Parish Share obligations, we have had end-year deficits and we are therefore now looking to increase our reserves if at all possible. The sale of a house owned by the PCC in early 2024 restored our cash reserves to a safer level. The money received has been invested to support the ongoing work of the church. We have been advised that we are likely to receive a substantial legacy from a former member of the congregation and expect that this also will be invested to produce regular income.

The 2023 Accounts show that giving from the congregation was over £123,000 including tax reclaimed under Gift Aid. In addition, just over £150,000 of income came from Pre-School fees, rentals, interest and other sources. Our total income covered total expenditure, with a surplus at the end of the year of about £4,000.

The position for 2024 to date shows a similar position, with a small surplus as at 30 September as a result of several legacies being received during the year.

The Finance Committee of the PCC intends to produce a balanced budget for 2025 in respect of regular income and expenditure. However, several capital projects are likely to come to fruition, the costs of which will be met from reserves. And, in contrast to previous years, we do not now have either a Curate or a full-time Children and Families worker although we would wish to have both at some point in the future.

Giving to missions

Many members of the congregation support their chosen mission bodies through individual giving but we also offer the opportunity to donate through the church's account. In 2023, over £10,000 was given in this way for mission purposes.

Since the pandemic, the Missions Group has not found it possible to revive the same level of support for mission within the church and there is a need to revive some of the regular events that helped to promote a mission focus, and indeed the Missions Group itself.

8. Buildings

Church

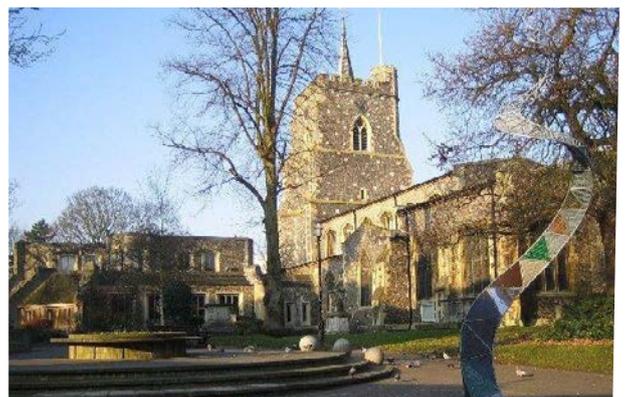
St Mary's is Grade 1 listed. Its oldest parts date back to 1230 but most dates from the 15th century. Its east end has two chapels: the Essex Chapel, containing notable tombs of the Essex family and other memorabilia; and the Heydon Chapel, now used for small gatherings. The tower has a peal of 10 bells regularly rung on Sundays and at special services. The Vestries and Church Office are located in an extension on the north side. The church seats around 350.

In 2018/9, the church interior was radically reordered, the main changes being:

- Removal of the Victorian pews and their replacement with chairs
- Installation of an under-floor heating system under a new stone floor
- Installation of new, raised floors in the chancel and Heydon chapel so that

the chancel and chapels became fully accessible

- Renewal of electrical services and installation of a flexible lighting system



The church's AV system was upgraded in 2023.

The latest quinquennial inspection, undertaken in early 2023, found that the fabric of the church was in good order with no significant defects. This reflects the dedication and generosity of the

congregation over past decades but as time goes on the challenge of maintaining such a historic building will increase.

The church is situated within a Conservation Area centred on the former churchyard. The 'Old Free School' (the original Watford Grammar School dating from 1704) and the 16th century Morrison Almshouses also contribute to this quiet and historic space which contrasts with the bustle of the High Street.



St Mary's is clearly visible from the High Street across a small pedestrian area, St Mary's Square. However, the north porch, which faces the High Street, does not provide an attractive entrance. Funding permitting, the PCC would wish to construct a more inviting entrance on that side of the church.

The church's central Watford location, while a huge asset in terms of outreach, means that access can be difficult at times such as Saturday mornings when Watford experiences heavy traffic. Parking adjacent to the church is very limited; visitors and some of the congregation often use the neighbouring multi-storey car park.

Church Centre

The Church Centre, which adjoins the south side of the church, was constructed in the late 1970s. The Centre has flexible meeting accommodation on the ground and first floors, allowing a maximum of five meeting spaces but enabling larger spaces to be provided if required. It also includes kitchen and toilet facilities and a two-bedroom caretaker's flat, currently let to tenants. Children's activities on a Sunday, weekday meetings and social events take place in the Centre, and spaces are also let out to organisations at various times during the week. St Mary's Pre-School occupies half of the ground floor each weekday in term-time.

The Centre was re-roofed in 2020, with its flooring and lighting being renewed in 2021. Further refurbishment, including upgrading the kitchen and toilets, would be desirable when funds allow. Its main entrance, facing the High St, was intended to provide the main entrance to the church but since parking is no longer allowed in the High Street most users now enter by the smaller west entrance. It would be desirable to remodel the interior and create a foyer at that entrance but funds have not permitted this.

Cloisters Office

Following the sale and redevelopment of the site of the previous Vicarage in the 1980s, the church was provided with offices on that site, south of the churchyard, to replace those that existed adjacent to the former Vicarage. These consist of a self-standing single-storey block of some 400ft² with toilet and small kitchen facilities which has two allocated car-parking spaces. The offices are leasehold, with a condition included in the lease that they may only be used for church or related purposes. It has, though, been more convenient for the Church Office to be located next to the Vestry and currently, New Hope, the local charity for the homeless founded by members of St Mary's in the 1990s, rents the Cloisters Office from the church.



Vicarage

The Vicarage is situated in a quiet residential road on the Cassiobury Estate about half a mile from the church at the boundary of the parish, there being no suitable houses nearer the church. It is close to Cassiobury Park, some 190 acres of open space beyond which are the Grand Union Canal and ancient woodland.

Constructed in 1991, the Vicarage is a detached house with four large bedrooms (one with en-suite), two reception rooms, a large kitchen and a study. The enclosed rear garden has a depth of about 30m. In addition to the integral garage, there is parking for two further cars on the driveway.

Further information about the Vicarage may be found [here](#).

The Infants and Junior schools on the Estate each have OFSTED 'Good' ratings. Watford has a number of secondary schools, including two selective grammar schools, both within walking distance of the Vicarage.