

Parish Profile

The United Benefice of
St NICHOLAS, STEVENAGE



with St MARY, GRAVELEY



May 2010

Parish Profile

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Parish Profile

Introduction

The benefice is vacant following the retirement of the previous incumbent.

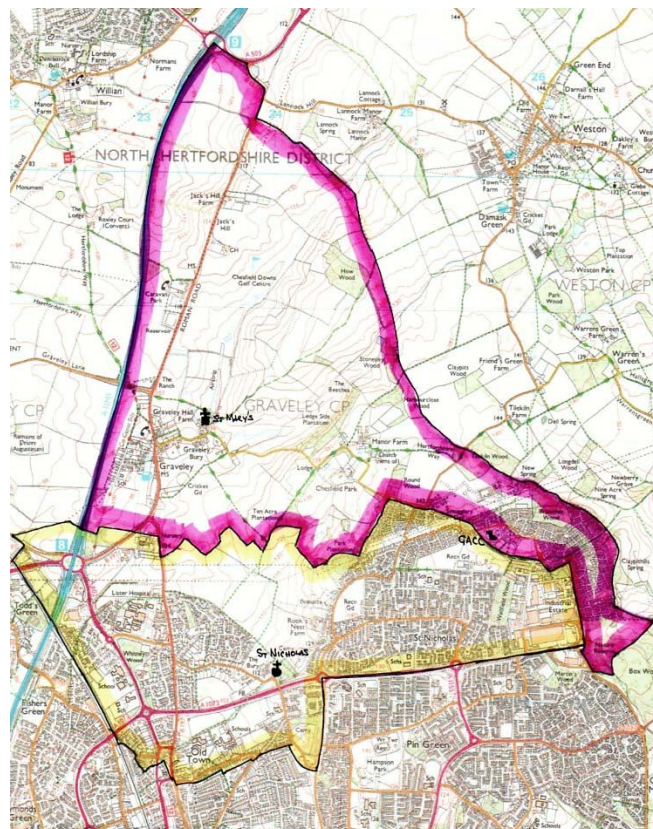
This profile is intended to give an overview of life and work at St Nicholas and St Mary. It includes information about the local neighbourhoods and our church communities, with details of our current patterns of worship. The profile also includes some information about Great Ashby Community Church, a new partnership church located in the benefice and supported by St Nicholas. Although Great Ashby Community Church is presently developing its own constitution it will still be within the benefice.

Our Vision:

To know Christ and make him known.

Website:

saintnicholaschurch.org.uk



Parish Profile

The Benefice

The parishes of St Nicholas, Stevenage and St Mary, Graveley were brought together to form a united benefice in 1998, the Vicar of St Nicholas also being the Rector of St Mary's.

The style of worship is broad, catering for a variety of constituencies, and ranges from traditional Book of Common Prayer to Common Worship and informal services. All congregations appreciate bible based and relevant preaching.

Both parishes look forward to working closely with a new incumbent and continue in the current spirit of co-operation whilst retaining their individual identities.

Location

Stevenage is in North Hertfordshire, about 30 miles to the north of London. It has good rail links being on the East Coast Mainline and is adjacent to the A1(M) motorway, between junctions 7 and 8. Graveley is a small village, approximately 2 miles from Stevenage, on its northern boundary.

The parish of St Nicholas extends around the northern edge of the Borough of Stevenage and includes parts of both the old and new towns, including some of the recent housing development of Great Ashby. The parish of St Mary adjoins the northern boundary of St Nicholas, extending around to the east, and falls within the area of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). St Mary's parish includes the major part of the Great Ashby neighbourhood. To the south and east is the parish of All Saints and to the south and west are the parishes of Holy Trinity and Christ the King.

*St Nicholas stands in an important conservation area in north Stevenage. The footpath through the churchyard leads to Forster Country, which is a large area of arable land overlooked by Rooks Nest House, where the author E M Forster lived as a child and set his novel *Howards End*. Within the churchyard is a memorial to Elizabeth Postern, who wrote the *Apple Tree Carol*.*

Community

Both parishes have Saxon origins.

St Mary's grew from a mainly agricultural community and now has a village population of around 450 (excluding Great Ashby) occupying approximately 180 houses and 50 permanent mobile homes in a park to the north of the village. The houses are mainly owner occupied with about 20% rented through North Herts Housing. There is also a privately run retirement home. Some families have lived in the village for many generations and others have moved in more recently. There is no predominance of any age group but there are not many young families as the houses are expensive.

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The village has a Parish Council and a village hall which is run by a Board of Trustees and is not connected to the church. Although there is no formal involvement of the church with the locality, being a small community members of the church congregation are involved in many village activities and others who do not attend services take an active interest in supporting the church.

St Nicholas is the ancient parish church of Stevenage and has served the community for most of this time. A daughter church, Holy Trinity, was built towards the end of the 19th century to cope with an increase in the population. Following the second world war the government announced the development of Stevenage New Town leading to an increase in population from around 5,000 in the early 20th century to almost 80,000 (2001 census). The town is organised into neighbourhoods and there are now eight Anglican parishes of which St Nicholas is the largest with a population of around 18,000 (excluding Great Ashby).

The parish is socially and economically diverse, with a wide age range, encompassing some of the most deprived areas of the town and the wealthiest. Some of the housing stock predates the post war new town but the majority is 1970 or later, there is a mixture of owner occupied property and council tenancies. The parish contains the Lister Hospital, presently expanding to become a major health resource in the county. There is a privately run psychiatric hospital, two NHS hospitals for elderly, dementia care and a number of sheltered housing courts for the elderly. There is also a small industrial area in the north east of the parish with several manufacturing and service units and a brown field site being in filled with housing. The neighbourhood centre on the St Nicholas estate includes shopping, a doctor's surgery and a community centre. There is a further doctor's surgery in the Old Town on the south western edge of the parish.

The town war memorial is located within the parish on the Bowling Green at the end of the Old Town High Street.

The neighbourhood of Great Ashby straddles both parishes and has a current population of about 8,000. Logistically part of Stevenage it actually comes under the auspices of NHDC. Great Ashby has been built over the last 8 years and is still growing. There is a small neighbourhood centre with shops, a community centre and a primary school. Great Ashby Community Church (GACC) was formally established in October 2006 and is a joint project between Bunyan Baptist Church in Stevenage Old Town and St Nicholas Parish Church. GACC meets in Round Diamond School and has strong links with the Great Ashby community centre.

In addition to the shopping in the neighbourhood centres, there is a florist, funeral directors and two restaurants around the Bowling Green at the end of the High Street. A Sainsbury super store is located by Junction 8 of the A1(M). There are many more shops in the wider area, Old Town High Street, New Town Centre and Retail Parks.

There is little employment in Graveley village and most people work in the surrounding towns or commute further afield. Major employers in Stevenage include GlaxoSmithKline, MBDA,

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EADS Astrium and Fujitsu with the Lister Hospital in the St Nicholas parish. There is also a wide variety of smaller enterprises. Many people commute to London.

Other churches in St Nicholas parish include Bunyan Baptist, the Church of the Transfiguration (Roman Catholic,) Stevenage Vineyard Church and Elim Pentecostal Church. There are no other churches in St Mary's parish.

Education



St Nicholas

There are four primary schools, Almond Hill Junior, Giles Nursery and Infants, Giles Junior and Leys JMI. Almond Hill, situated a few hundred yards from the church, has close links with the church and the previous incumbent was a governor. St Nicholas in partnership with Bridge Builders (a local charitable trust focusing on children's work and young families in primary schools and churches) is developing an Education Project investing resources in building relationships with schools in and around both parishes taking school assemblies, RE classes and encouraging school visits to the church. Just outside the parish boundary is Letchmore Road Infants School which is linked to Almond Hill Junior.

Three secondary schools, Thomas Alleyne, Barclay and John Henry Newman (Roman Catholic) are located in the parish but have only minor contact for educational visits and the occasional carol service. It is proposed to relocate the Thomas Alleyne School into the Great Ashby neighbourhood in 2012.

The church is also linked with St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, formerly located in the parish but now in the new town centre parish of St Andrew and St George. The church is able to nominate parishioners to become foundation governors at the school.



Great Ashby Community Church

GACC has no building of its own but at present enjoys a very fruitful partnership with Round Diamond JMI school, the only school in the Great Ashby neighbourhood. GACC uses the school facilities for worship on Sundays and has organised community carol services in the school. GACC also supports assemblies and RE classes in the school and has joined in with the school fete.



St Mary

A pre-school playgroup is held in the village hall on weekdays. Graveley Primary School for infants and juniors was recently extended and refurbished; it has a current roll of 110 children. It is a Voluntary Primary (Controlled) School with two foundation governors, one being the rector and the other selected by the Diocesan Education Board on the recommendation of the St Mary's PCC. St Mary is building more relationships with Graveley School and the Rector is invited into the school from time to time to lead assemblies. The school holds some services in the church.

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Leisure and Recreation

There are two recreation fields on the St Nicholas neighbourhood estate, a rugby club and sports facility by the hospital, several school playing fields, sports centre at John Henry Newman school and a number of open spaces and playgrounds. There is a public house in the St Nicholas neighbourhood centre, another near the hospital on North Road and a third in the Old Town on Walkern Road. There are numerous pubs and restaurants in the High Street at the edge of the St Nicholas parish.

There are two pubs and a restaurant in Graveley High Street. In the village there are also a riding stable, a children's playground, a 'pick your own' fruit farm and a garden centre. Graveley has a successful cricket team, a golf course, a fitness centre and table tennis club. Recently a book club and a walking group have been formed. There is an annual Village Fete and Senior Citizens Christmas Party. St Mary's holds a flower festival and an open gardens event on alternate years to raise funds.

In addition there are many parks and leisure facilities in the wider town of Stevenage, including the Stevenage Borough football team, Fairland's Valley with parkland and boating lakes, and King George Field with a cricket and bowls green used by Stevenage Town Bowls Club. Stevenage Leisure Centre includes the Gordon Craig Theatre and extensive sports facilities. The nearby Leisure Park has a multiplex cinema, bowling, fitness centre, clubs and restaurants.

Buildings and Trust Lands



St Nicholas

The Saxon church on this site was replaced by a Norman one in about 1100 AD, but the only remaining part of this is the great, thick-walled flint tower which houses a ring of eight bells. The church structure has been partially rebuilt so many times that it is a patchwork of nine centuries of local endeavour. It is a Grade 1 listed building and includes entrance porch, nave, north and south aisles, choir, Lady chapel, Trinity chapel and vestry. The chapels were both endowed. There are many items of interest in the church including an ancient stone font with a medieval carved wooden cover, six 14th century misericords, a carved reredos dating from 1890, a Victorian organ and a number of stained glass windows.

The church building is excellently maintained. In 2008 St Nicholas was the beneficiary of a substantial legacy from Robert Hawkes which came as a great and grateful surprise. The Hawkes Bequest has enabled an enormous amount of work to be completed in 2009 / 10 including complete interior redecoration and drainage works outside. Future projects are well in hand and include refurbishment of the Vestry and exterior stonework repairs. The next quinquennial inspection is due in 2013.

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The church comfortably seats about 250 people and there is a recently refurbished Parish Room off the south aisle, with a well equipped kitchen and two upstairs toilets.

The churchyard is closed but a footpath links to the Council run Weston Road cemetery. There are important and rare wild flower areas in the churchyard and bats inhabit the belfry. The Friends of Forster Country installed a memorial at the rear gate of the churchyard in recent years. A number of historic bequests, together with the addition of a small annual grant from the Borough Council, have funded the churchyard maintenance for many years. However, with funds expected to run out by the end of 2010 we are about to enter negotiations with the Borough Council regarding future arrangements.

The Vicarage is a spacious, four bedroom house, built in the 1960's, with a large well maintained garden located a mile away from the church close to Stevenage Old Town. It is a detached house with an integral garage. The accommodation includes a kitchen and utility, separate dining and living rooms, cloakroom and study.

The Hawkes Bequest includes a four bedroom house in Chestnut Walk, about 500 yards from the church which is currently let on a short term lease, as well as a share in a property in the Old Town which is in the process of being sold.

Burymead and the Avenue are historic trust lands bequeathed to St Nicholas and currently let on a peppercorn rent to the Borough Council. Burymead is at the end of the Old Town High Street, next to the vicarage and the Avenue runs from Burymead up towards the church.

St Mary



St Mary's is a small, picturesque church, parts of which date back to the 12th century. It is built of local flint with stone facings and consists of nave, chancel, tower, vestry and porch with an additional aisle built in 1890. It features an unusual 13th century piscina, a 15th century bell tower with six bells, an angel roof, attractive Victorian stained glass windows, oak and pine pews and an electric organ.

St Mary's is in good order thanks to the encouragement and support of the local community as well as fund raising efforts by the congregation. The heating system has been improved in recent years but there are no toilet facilities. In 2009 the windows were cleaned and repaired, the ground level woodwork was treated against woodworm and the clock dial was refurbished. The replacement of the tower floor is in progress. The quinquennial report in 2009 recommended redecoration of the interior.

Members of the laity are responsible for cleaning and minor repairs and maintenance jobs in the church and churchyard. The churchyard is still open.

There are no additional church buildings and no rectory.

Parish Profile

Worship

The style of worship is, for want of a better term, Low Church and relaxed, ranging from traditional BCP through Common Worship to more informal worship using Taize, Celtic Prayer, Praise services and occasional healing services.

Most services at GACC are services of the word, with communion once a month.

Attendance ranges from around 10-15 for the early and evening services to 50-80 at the main service in St Nicholas and 15-30, mostly adults, at St Mary.

Although there is currently no junior church at St Mary, both St Nicholas and GACC have flourishing Sunday Schools with around 20 children in each.

Weekly Services

St Nicholas



Sunday

8.00 am	Every Sunday	<i>Holy Communion (said), Book of Common Prayer</i>
10.00 am	1st Sunday	<i>All Age Worship</i>
	Other Sundays	<i>Parish Communion and Junior Church</i>
6.30 pm	1st Sunday	<i>Parish Communion, Common Worship</i>
	2nd and 4th Sundays	<i>Evening Prayer</i>
	3rd and 5th Sunday	<i>Informal Worship</i>

The 10.00 am service is the principal service, the second, fourth and fifth Sundays being more traditional services based on Common Worship Prayer A or B; the third Sunday is less formal using CW Prayer H. Junior Church is at the same time as the service and refreshments are served afterwards.

Wednesday

11.15 am	1st and 3rd Wednesdays	<i>Holy Communion, Book of Common Prayer</i>
	Other Wednesdays	<i>Morning Prayer</i>

St Mary



Sunday

11.30 am	1st Sunday	<i>Holy Communion, Common Worship</i>
	2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays	<i>Family Worship</i>
	3rd Sundays	<i>Morning Worship</i>

Great Ashby Community Church



Sunday

10.30 am	Every Sunday	<i>Morning Service as announced and Junior Church</i>
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Parish Profile

Occasional Offices



St Nicholas

The numbers of occasional offices is large with a good potential for mission. In 2009 there were no baptisms, weddings or funerals during the first quarter due to the redecoration of the church. For the remainder of the year there were 57 baptisms, on second and fourth Sundays with up to three families at each service; 34 weddings, mostly on Saturdays (up to three on any one day) and 39 funerals, 20 in church and 19 at crematoriums (Harwood Park, Stevenage and Luton).



St Mary

In 2009 there were 4 baptisms and 2 funerals. There are 5 weddings and 1 renewal of vows booked for 2010.



GACC

St Nicholas takes on the occasional offices for the Anglican membership of Great Ashby although there have been some children baptised at the church.

Special Events



St Nicholas

It has been our practice to hold Family Festival Communion at Easter, Harvest and Christmas. We also have communions on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday, a procession on Palm Sunday, meditation services through Holy Week and a 3 hour service on Good Friday. We hold an annual Bereavement Service and participate in the town wide Remembrance Day service held at the Bowling Green. We have a Christingle service, 9 Lessons & Carols, Nativity and Midnight Eucharist at Christmas. Christmas and Easter services are well attended with up to 150 people at Easter and over 350 people for the Christmas services. St Nicholas has hosted the Deanery Confirmation service twice in the last three years.



St Mary

Special services are held every year, led by the churchwardens, which include a candle-lit Carol Service, Christingle, Sea Sunday, Harvest Festival, Mothering Sunday, Remembrance Day, Good Friday and a service of Easter hymns and readings on the Sunday after Easter. On Christmas Day and Easter Sunday there is a churchwarden led family service followed by a short communion (including sermon) led by the Rector. The attendance at these services is usually higher than average and we expect over 100 for the carol service. A shortened Prayer Book Communion service is held once a month at Halcyon Days, the retirement home in the village.

Parish Profile

Pastoral and Ecumenical

Ministry and Leadership

Reverend Christine Hina is the Associate Minister with special responsibility for GACC. John Forster is a Lay leader; a former head teacher who has considered ordination and at one time commenced training to be a Lay Reader. He is presently concentrating on his work with children through Bridge Builders Christian Trust and leading the St Nicholas Education Project.



The present churchwardens at St Mary's are long serving (one since 1982 and the other since 1991) and lead family services and occasional special services as well as doing verger duties and other odd jobs as needed. The PCC has 10 members plus the churchwardens and Deanery Synod representative; it meets 4-5 times a year.



The St Nicholas churchwardens, although long standing members of the church are new to the role. Both are becoming more involved in leading the family service. In addition there is occasional lay leadership for evening prayer and informal worship services. In addition to the ministry team, churchwardens and 3 Deanery Synod representatives, the PCC has 10 elected and co-opted members; it meets 6 times a year. There are also sub groups to consider matters of fabric, finance, child protection, mission, pastoral and vision.



Great Ashby organise their own worship which draws on both Baptist and Anglican traditions with Fresh Expressions for a seeker friendly group; their core leadership team includes a full time Baptist Minister, Sue Hardwidge, and Christine together with 2 lay preachers and elders from Bunyan Baptist.

There are strong links with other churches in the town through the North Stevenage Group and Churches Together in Stevenage.

Clergy Support

At St Nicholas the PCC secretary also provides administrative support (for which an honorarium is paid) to the incumbent and churchwardens; also for baptism and wedding bookings and administration.

A recently formed Vestry Team (11 lay people) carries out the initial preparation for baptisms and takes wedding bookings. In addition there are 2 baptism visitors who visit in the week prior to the baptism.

A small number of people participate in pastoral visiting but it is not formally organised.

One of the churchwardens at St Mary's also fulfils the role of PCC secretary and looks after all general administrative matters, running the parish office from her home.

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Electoral Roll

For St Nicholas the 2010 electoral roll has 162 people of whom 98 are non resident. There are 48 names on the electoral roll for St Mary's. There is no electoral roll for GACC but regular attendance is around 40-45 adults.

Communications

St Nicholas and GACC each have a weekly news sheet. Until the end of 2009 St Nicholas published a monthly magazine which was widely circulated but this has been discontinued in 2010 due to lack of resources for managing and editing. It has been replaced by a smaller monthly leaflet called Grape Vine. St Mary's has a parish magazine, Graveley Matters, which is edited and printed by members of the PCC; it contains church and village news and articles. Circulation is 110. A small number of the diocesan See Round magazines are distributed on a monthly basis.

St Nicholas is in the process of redesigning its website, which includes pages related to St Mary – stnicholaschurch.org.uk. GACC has its own website - greatashbycc.org.uk.

Outreach and Mission

Mission giving in St Nicholas and St Mary is around £6k pa. Social events for mission include Pancakes and Beetles for the Lent Appeal and a Christian Aid Quiz Night. We are all Fair Trade churches.

Local involvement includes Street Pastors, Living Room, The Haven, Bridge Builders (generally and the Education Project in particular); one of our congregation is pastoral visitor at Elizabeth Court, a residential unit for the elderly mentally infirm; work with CTIS (including Lent Lectures), actively involved in Back to Church Sunday and experience of running Alpha courses.

Internationally there is a strong relationship with CMS mission partners, Colin and Anita Smith in Nairobi, Hunger Lunches support Christian Aid, MAF and Water Aid among others; links with the Philippines and Sri Lanka; street collections for Christian Aid week. Other collections include support for Send-a-Cow, Biblelands, the Children's Society (Christingle) and disaster appeals.

Mission and community are key to the strategy of GACC and there are strong links in the local community working with the community centre and the school. In addition there is a focus on the Baptist Home Mission Fund, Baptist World Mission, CMS, and Samaritan's Purse and they support a student at All Nations Christian College who is taking up missionary work in Peru.

Parish Profile

Groups and Organisations

Music

St Nicholas does not currently have a musical director or resident organist, despite great efforts to replace the last one when work took him away from the area. Music is managed with visiting organists and a rota of keyboard players; on occasion there is guitar and flute accompaniment. A small, determined choir is augmented for weddings and for 9 Lessons and Carols.

At present, St Mary's only sing hymns at services, mainly from Mission Praise (no psalms). There is no resident organist but rota of people who each play once a month. A small choir, formed a year ago sings on the first Sunday each month and at some special services.

A CCL license is held.

Servers and Sides persons

At St Nicholas there are established teams of deputy wardens and welcomers for Sunday services, including Baptisms. There are 3 altar servers and a rota for communion assistants. There is extended permission in place for 6 people (2 at St Mary and 4 at St Nicholas) for administering reserved sacrament in church and for sick communion. There is also a team of vergers for wedding and funeral services.

Lay participation

In addition to lay participation mentioned earlier at St Nicholas there is an established rota for readers at all services and within the last year a prayer team has been re-established to help with intercessions at some services.

Parish Groups

Both St Nicholas and GACC have flourishing Sunday Schools catering for up to 20 children during the main service. Children and Communion courses and Confirmation courses, for children and adults are run regularly.

Both St Mary and St Nicholas have a small choir and each has a band of bell ringers. At St Nicholas there are 2 established Home Groups. Meeting on a monthly basis there is a ladies group, Leaven, and a Hunger Lunch Club, who raise mission funds. There are teams for cleaning and flower arranging, and a rota for refreshments after the main service.

There are two external pre-school groups regularly using the parish room at present, Happy Hedgehogs and Foster Bugs.

Parish Profile

Finance



St Nicholas

Income in 2009 was £76,425, including St Mary's contribution towards the Parish Share. Planned giving was £35,020 and £11,377 was tax refunded from Gift Aiding. Wedding and funeral fees amounted to £10,132. Total expenditure was £89,120 and included £51,554 for Parish Share and £6,012 in mission giving.

A copy of the 2009 audited accounts for St Nicholas is available.



St Mary

In 2009 St Mary's income was £14,676 of which £4,179 was given in church collections. Gift Aid envelopes are used by most of the regular congregation. Expenditure was £24,074 which included £13,500 for repairs and maintenance. St Mary makes a contribution to the St Nicholas Parish Share of 10%, which in 2009 amounted to £5,100. Donations were made to various charities totalling £200 and the Christingle service collection was donated to The Children's Society.

A copy of the 2009 independently examined accounts for St Mary is available.



GACC

Finances are managed by Bunyan Baptist. Christine's stipend, which is presently subsidised by the Diocese, is included in the St Nicholas Parish Share and St Nicholas meets Christine's expenses.

Expenses of Office

Incumbent's expenses are met in full. St Mary's pays a standing order for £25 per month to St Nicholas as a contribution towards expenses.

An honorarium is paid for administrative support to the incumbent.

Hawkes Bequest

St Nicholas has benefited enormously from the unexpected Hawkes Bequest. The Bequest, valued at around £1m at the time it was made in 2008, consisted of property, shares and cash. The terms are limited to the repair and maintenance of the church fabric.

Friend of St Nicholas

The Friends of St Nicholas is a Charitable Trust registered with the Charities Commission. Its purpose is to finance the preservation and restoration of the parish church of St Nicholas.

Parish Profile

The Future

Strengths and Weaknesses

Both parishes have attractive buildings in peaceful surroundings with a calm and welcoming atmosphere. The buildings are focal points to draw people in but, being off the beaten track, away from the centre of the village or the main housing and shopping areas we do not have many people just dropping in.

Maintenance of the fabric is no longer an issue for St Nicholas, and St Mary's enjoys strong support for fund raising in the village community. However lack of flexibility, inadequate meeting, office and storage space, lack of disabled toilets and facilities for larger events inhibits development of the use of the buildings for worship and other needs in a modern community. Parking is limited.

Both parishes have a friendly and welcoming community who generally help and care for each other and we offer a wide variety of services to diverse congregations.

The location of the Vicarage, away from the church may be viewed as either a strength or a weakness.

Aspirations

We have many aspirations, some for the short term and others for the longer term; some more easily achievable than others. They include (in no particular order):

- ❖ increasing and developing lay participation in leadership, pastoral care and bereavement visiting;*
- ❖ renewal of mission and development of potential growth, through the occasional offices in particular;*
- ❖ improved outreach and social contact (we have ideas such as beating the bounds and harvest supper);*
- ❖ having both church buildings open more often;*
- ❖ enhancing the musical leadership;*
- ❖ improving our stewardship, giving to match our commitments;*
- ❖ developing the education centre at St Nicholas*
- ❖ improving the facilities – kitchen and toilets at St Mary, a new parish hall extension at St Nicholas.*

Parish Profile

New Incumbent Profile

We are looking for a priest who is a spiritual leader with a love and sensitivity for God, for our people and the wider communities; someone who will appreciate the diversity of our broad church, in our urban and rural communities. He or she will lead with prayer, teaching and study rooted in scripture.

Our new priest should be an enabler who can recognise the gifts of our people and encourage us to develop and use those gifts for God's purposes. There is a need to develop the mission and stewardship of our churches for outreach, so we are looking for someone able to communicate clearly and consistently, to encourage, enthuse and nurture our people.

We would like a person able to keep a sense of proportion, willing to work with our partner church and the Christian communities in the area. A person who will, through natural organisational and administrative skills, equip the churches to "Know Christ and to make Him known."

In return, we will offer our love and willingness to be alongside him or her, in growing the church through God's grace, to welcome, support, encourage and to listen. We know that to give, means that we also need to be filled and we would encourage our new Priest to be replenished and renewed both spiritually through retreats and seminars and physically through regular days off and annual leave.

We look forward to the next step in our journey with our new priest.

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Parish Contact Details



St Nicholas Church

Rectory Lane
Stevenage
SG1 4DA

Churchwardens:

Paul Drakes
01438 211665
paul.drakes@ntlworld.com

Liz Hare
01438 353754
lizhare@ntlworld.com



St Mary's Church

Church Lane
Graveley
SG4 7LU

Parish Office at the home of Churchwarden and PCC secretary,
Hilary Thompson
01438 720771
hilary.thompson@btinternet.com

Margaret Donovan
01438 351170



Great Ashby Community Church

Secretary: *Mr Owen Smith*
07952 323693
Secretary@greatashbycc.org.uk