



St Mary's Church

S P E L D H U R S T

2024



PLEASE KEEP
DOGS ON A LEAD
AND REMOVE

St Mary's Church

S P E L D H U R S T

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Welcome

Welcome to St Mary's, Speldhurst, where our mission is to grow the love of Jesus in our community. We're looking for an energetic incumbent to lead us further in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the wider world.

We're sure God wants to do more in our community. We want to be a church that can be both relevant in serving its community and evolve in its ministry. We already run outreach activities including parent & children sessions and a popular community choir. And many of our congregation are involved in our village community shop, clubs and more. But we want to develop these activities and take God's word more effectively into our community.

The purpose of this document is to describe who we are, how we live and work together, and how we worship; who are the people we hope and pray will become disciples; and the key attributes of the leader we need to help us grow.



We're sure God wants to do more in our community. We want to be a church that can be both relevant in serving its community and evolve in its ministry.

About St Mary's

St Mary's is a family-friendly Church of England community at the heart of a popular medium-sized rural village near Tunbridge Wells. Speldhurst is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and has around 1500 residents, with a thriving primary school, shop, pub and village hall, a recreation ground, a doctor's surgery, and much more. (You can see more about Speldhurst in the appendix.)

Our weekly services have a congregation of around 100 and our thriving homegroups have around 100 members and extend beyond the regular congregation. Our congregation is mostly from Speldhurst or nearby, formed of around 30% young families, 40% retired people and 30% in between.

We asked some of our newest members what they've noticed about St Mary's:

"It's busy, for a village church." We have a healthy attendance on Sundays, and a particularly full house at our range of Christmas services, school services and Easter. Our evensong and matins services attract far fewer but are also much loved.

"It's full of children." An average Sunday sees 25 children joining in one of the three Sunday clubs, with involvement across the year from over 30 families. We really want to keep building on that, especially for the older years, where involvement is dropping.

"It's multigenerational."... as anyone watching youngsters weave around the feet of the 70- and 80-year olds at the coffee corner will notice.

"There's a hunger for discipleship." We've got some shining beacons of discipleship in Speldhurst. Others of us maybe feel we're more stuck at the theoretical stage.

"The online services during lockdown were a joy." The church brought together a great team, learnt new skills, and over two years involved more than 90 members of the congregation in readings, testimonials, teaching, music and more.

"There are a lot of homegroups." Our next step is to weave them more into the everyday life and teaching of the church, and make things more accessible for newcomers.

Like any church, we also have our challenges:

- ◆ **We find it hard to provide for over-11s and young adults.** That's partly a question of leadership, partly overcoming the normal teen dropoff, and partly the challenge and opportunity of really developing faith in the families who come in the early years because they need a signature for the local church secondary school.
- ◆ **We rely heavily on a relatively small number of volunteers** for some things, and they are getting older. On the one hand we are blessed with 70 DBS checked and safeguarding trained volunteers, many of whom help with children's groups, coffee rotas and so on. On the other hand, we struggle for volunteers in the key areas of wardening, teenage leadership, prayer, pastoral, buildings management and finance.
- ◆ While we're blessed with healthy finances, **we rely on a small number of donors.**
- ◆ **Our wonderful worship leader has recently moved away** and we are currently recruiting to replace her.
- ◆ **It can be hard to reach some segments of our parish,** e.g. busy families with both partners working, families whose Sundays become focused on sport.
- ◆ Except for the effort of a few individuals, **we don't do much outreach** at the moment, including Alpha etc. We also feel we could reach a new depth of prayer as a church.
- ◆ At the heart of our mission is the wish to build discipleship. It would be wonderful if every member of our congregation felt they had **a big role to play in helping make disciples.**
- ◆ **We haven't taken enough advantage of digital opportunities.** We have relaunched our website recently but recognise the need to further improve our communications and digital footprint.
- ◆ **Replacing our rector who was with us for the past 21 years is both a challenge and an exciting opportunity.** Creating this parish profile has been a great chance for us to discuss as a church not only how to describe where we are now and where we feel we are being called, but also how we think we need to be blessed by a new leader.



"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans"

- PROVERBS 3



Our Identity and Vision

St Mary's ran a series of workshops recently to explore what we thought God's vision was for our church, and we identified five main themes:

- ◆ Growing in Christian character
- ◆ Belonging to the 'family' of St Mary's
- ◆ Supporting families and young people in the village
- ◆ Being involved in the community / being 'good neighbours'
- ◆ Creating a more accessible church community



Our new vision statement, 'Growing the love of Jesus in our community' reflects these themes. We would appreciate more leadership to help us test these themes and focus as a community around them.

The Vision exercise reminded us that it's hard to hear from the people we don't hear from. Both within the church – our vision workshops had input from only 40 out of 160 people – and in our wider community. We'd like a leader who can help us to reach beyond where we are at the moment, and to discern what God might be telling us outside our normal thinking.



We are prayerfully seeking an incumbent who wants to lead us further along this path – someone vibrant, energetic and warm-hearted. Over the following pages we'll tell you more about the many sides to life at St Mary's, from bumps & babes and bacon butties, to worship and wardens and weekends away. If God is calling you to help to steer our next chapter, we are sure you will be blessed in this wonderful community and beautiful location.



The Future

We look forward to working with our new incumbent on developing our goals for the future, but these are some of the things that are currently on our heart, and tie in with some of our vision workshop themes:

- ◆ Continuing to grow the number of young families, and – crucially – finding ways to keep them in the church as their children grow older. We want to see new people across the board come to faith in Jesus Christ; to find ways to disciple them; to see them taking on leadership roles, tithing where possible, and flourishing as Christians
- ◆ Growing in our knowledge of the Bible, and becoming deeper Christians, both as a church and individually, along with a deepening heart for prayer
- ◆ We have ambitious plans to make our building more relevant to our community and our mission; a practical and a spiritual hub which is in use throughout the week and not just on Sundays.
- ◆ We feel we should do God's work in a way that is practical and relevant to the people we don't yet know in our community, and we would like to explore ways of discerning this.

We also want to:

- ◆ Continue to build our people – growing in their knowledge of the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit – supporting them to live every day in relationship with Him
- ◆ Develop an increasing culture of discipleship, prayer and biblical teaching
- ◆ Enable a family culture that is engagingly missional and community-aware.
- ◆ Build on our strong relationship with the village school
- ◆ Grow younger leaders
- ◆ Love and re-engage 'lost sheep', such as families who have drifted away from church, and young people who return to the village after education.



Your Leadership Team

Wardens and Deputy Wardens



Worship



Youth and Families

Discipleship and Outreach

Pastoral & Spiritual Support



Safeguarding

Premises

Finance



Readers



St Mary's DDC



Parish Administrator



UPCC Secretary



What We Do – Our Ministry

How We Worship

Our main 10am church services use the CofE Common Worship material and we try to make our worship as accessible as possible.

Currently we have two services of communion each month, one service of the word and an All Age service of the word. On a fifth Sunday, we celebrate communion together as the whole church family with either a cafe-style communion service in the school or with breakfast together first, in church.

We mostly follow the lectionary, occasionally deviating from this when both the home groups and the Sunday congregation study the same theme. Recently we have used a couple of the LICC's Frontline series in this way. We've also studied Ephesians using Dave Smith's Transformed Life and Transformed Living.

Our intercessions are led by members of the congregation both young and old and we are blessed by good readers of all ages to read our lessons each Sunday.

The children enjoy being part of the main congregation at the beginning and end of each service, leaving for their own sessions in the middle, and then feeding back what they have been learning.

We also have two BCP services a month, an 8 o'clock HC service and an evensong at 6pm.

In the school summer holidays we move away from the church building for some fun roving services, including breakfast or refreshments. Last year they took place in gardens, an orchard and the recreation ground, and culminated in a campout and messy church at the village school. They're a lovely way to worship in a different light, mix the generations and get people out of their usual seats in church.

We don't want any family to feel awkward about coming to church. We are very used to the happy sight of toddlers exploring the aisles during sermons, and there is a parent-led creche too.



"Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord"

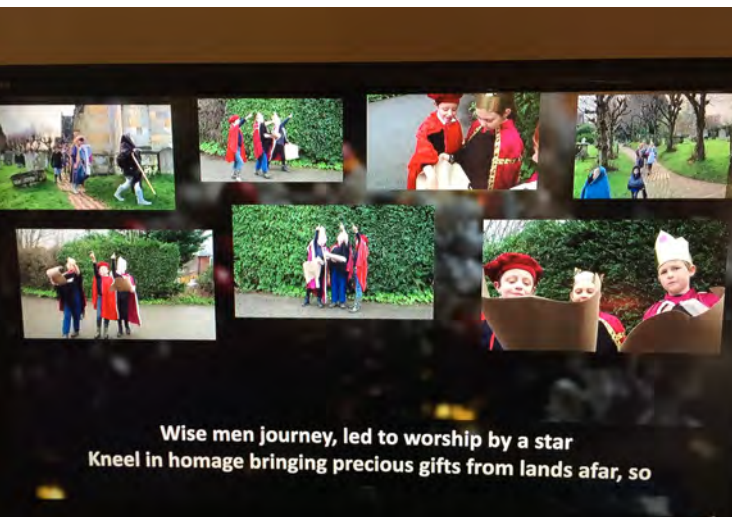
- EPHESIANS 5 :19

Our Music Styles

We have a well maintained and good quality organ at St Mary's and are used to a combination of organ and keyboard led worship. Our talented music leader (who could play both instruments) was a huge blessing to us – you can see many of the songs she led for our online services on St Marys' YouTube channel – but she and her family have recently moved away, and we are currently recruiting for a music leader. This opens a new chapter in our worship.

For now we're worshipping in a variety of styles using a mixture of organ, keyboard, guitar and pre-recorded tracks.

One thing we would definitely love to see is younger people joining in leading worship, and we are working on this.



Our Online Services

In Covid times, our YouTube services were a big hit, with over 90 of the congregation involved in recording a mix of songs, hymns, liturgy, teaching, and testimonies, and, as far as we could tell, over 200 viewers a week. We also produced a wonderful video nativity on location around the village and collaborated on embarrassing recordings of the My Lighthouse song.

Prayer

There is a feeling that we are ready to reinvigorate the prayer life in our church. Just gathering together recently for weekly prayer about our vacancy and next steps has been a breath of fresh air.

We have an active prayer group that prays individually or as a chain for others.



Children and Young Families

Speldhurst is popular with young families. As well as Sunday groups for 3 to 14 year olds, we run two preschool-age groups, and a monthly 'dads and kids' group, with a particular heart for families who might previously have thought the church building was just for other people.

We're blessed with a strong relationship with our village C of E school, where we are welcomed to run a popular prayer space every week, and weekly Acts of Worship. We run Messy Church and an annual family camping weekend at the school too, and the school comes to the church building four times a year for their services. Scouts and other local uniformed groups complete the picture.

Sunday Groups

We have crafts, games and teaching for 3 to 14 year olds every Sunday (apart from the last Sunday of the month, which is an all-age service). The young people join us for the start of the 10:00am service, then head out to three age-appropriate groups, and then return for a show & tell at the front of the church.

Other Groups

Bumps & Babes are welcoming fortnightly coffee mornings in people's houses, for new parents with children under two.

Praise & Play is St Marys' midweek Toddler Group for all under 5s and their parents/carers. We meet weekly in the church on Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9:00 - 10:30am during term time. People come and enjoy the toys, craft, story time and play in the company of other local families.

And 'Who let the dads out' is our monthly bacon-butties and good company meetup in church, for dads, male carers and their children. Always fun.

We are committed to maintaining an environment that is safe for all children, young people and vulnerable adults.



Youth

There are dozens of secondary school children in Speldhurst, and the number involved in our church goes through cycles. In the last few years a dozen or more were involved in a Sunday group or one of our two midweek evening groups, but post-Covid the groups have not restarted, partly because of numbers, and partly because it's been hard to develop a new generation of leaders. We are now trying to build a teen Sunday morning group, with limited interest so far.

For something completely different, our experienced bellringing team makes youth members welcome. It's a lovely way to mix generations and have a short break from normal teen life.



Older People and Others in Need

As a village church in a relatively affluent area, we have a high number of older people in both our congregation and the wider community. We have two nursing homes in the village and an age-exclusive block of flats.

Our small pastoral team and other church members offer support either in people's homes, or in one of the nursing homes in the area. The pastoral team take communion (wherever possible) to those who want to receive it, make regular visits to the nursing homes, and visit members of the congregation in hospital.

From visits to recently bereaved parishioners, lifts provided to hospital visitors, to food taken to the doorstep of those in need, we do our best to be good neighbours. One of our home groups helps

facilitate a monthly lunch for elderly members of the community and harvest gifts are distributed to the community every year. We also provide a drop-off point for the local Nourish Foodbank and donations made weekly are delivered to their premises in Tunbridge Wells for onward distribution.

At St Mary's we do our best to ensure our services are inclusive, both during the 10:00am Sunday morning service and through additional services such as Matins and Evensong. Being able to mix together in multigenerational services and activities (all-age, summer services, bring & share meals) is a blessing to both the oldest and youngest members of the congregation, and everyone in between.

Homegroups

Nearly 100 people at St Mary's already enjoy friendship and encouragement in their faith in one of our 13 homegroups. There are daytime and evening groups. All enjoy a mixture of prayer time, chat, Bible study and social events. Sometimes homegroups opt to follow the same course at the same time, supported by a teaching series in church.

The homegroup leaders meet three times a year for prayer and support, and are helped by two coordinators.

We encourage everyone to join a homegroup, wherever they are on their journey of faith, and we can help people find one that feels like home. Each group has its own character and approach; in some the members have a lot in common, some are diverse, a number include members from beyond the village.

Courses

We have only run one small Alpha course and a short parenting course in recent years, but we have started moving forward again and we feel we have a lot more to offer in making God's will come alive in our village.

The challenges of parenting and young people's mental health are particularly on our heart. In October 2024 we are planning a Raising Faith course (Care for the Family), and we are planning another Alpha course for autumn.

Community

Living out our faith in community is a big part of the St Mary's way, and often in a quiet fashion.

We aspire to embody God's loving presence in our community and we try hard to be involved with the community, and to make openings for non-churchgoers to join in with what we do.

Our three annual walking holidays, our Christmas tree decoration with hearty carols, and our 'Who let the dads out?' kids' and dads' breakfasts are all unthreatening ways to enjoy time in Christian company. In the past between 30 and 90 of us have enjoyed going to Spring Harvest, where guests are always encouraged.

We have a central presence at the village fete, gently winning hearts and minds with cakes and drinks, and our church members are familiar faces at the village Men on Wednesdays discussion group, and form a significant part of the volunteer rota at the village community shop.

Our Christmas Community Choir is a delight. It had over 55 members last year, about half of whom were non-churchgoers, and the children's crib services filled the church twice over.

A number of our church members are part of friendly groups that meet for monthly walks and chats in our beautiful local countryside, and we also enjoy legendary men's walking weekends in the Lake District twice a year. Men are often not great at getting together, and this sets us right every time, with guests welcome.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."
- EPHESIANS 5 :19

Website and Communications

We redesigned our website to be welcoming and informative for newcomers, and we keep the basics up to date with what's on, and our latest videos. We really enjoyed making it reflect the community we are. There's plenty more we want to do with it, and we're in discussion about that.

Our Church Administrator is a fount of knowledge and many people's first contact with St Mary's, and we send a weekly email newsletter to everyone who is registered with us.

Mission Partners

We support two 'official' overseas missionary couples in Guatemala and in Laos. At home, members of our congregation are involved with Youth for Christ, Street Pastors and Empathy Action. All of these Christian charities are supported by our church and considered to be mission partners. A member of our congregation is also heavily involved in Operation Christmas Child (Samaritan's Purse) and this receives strong support from the congregation.

Appendix 1:

Speldhurst

Speldhurst is a popular, family-friendly village of about 700 houses in an Area of Outstanding Beauty and a Special Landscape Area. It's only three miles from Tunbridge Wells, but it's surrounded by woodland and countryside, and you can walk or cycle for miles in some directions without coming across a major road.

The village is blessed with an outstanding Church of England primary school, a community-run shop and post office, and 13th Century pub. If you go past the modern village hall, you might hear the cheerful hubbub of the nursery, birthday parties, Rainbows, Brownies and Scouts, dance and drama classes, the weekly library, and even quilting and snooker clubs.

Our recreation ground is home to a children's playground and clubs for cricket, football, bowls and the Kent sport of stoolball, as well as the annual fete and the pram race, a pop-up cafe in the summer (it's held in our church during the winter months) and the daily bustle of people walking and friends meeting. You'll also find the village allotments there. There are two nursing homes in the parish, and St Mary's plays a part in both of them.

A church has been at the heart of Speldhurst both physically and in terms of the community since the 1100s and the grade 2 listed Victorian sandstone structure of St Mary's is the latest version. You can read more about the building later in this document.

Tunbridge Wells is a pleasant town with good shops, schools and restaurants, two theatres and the historic Pantiles precinct; and rail commuters from Speldhurst can get to London in 40-60 minutes from the local stations.



Appendix 2:

Building and Finances

The people of this parish have been coming to St Mary's to worship for over 900 years. A charter book compiled in 1115, names the church at Speldhurst and suggests that it was founded before the Conquest.

St Mary's Church is Listed Grade II* and is a building of national architectural and historic importance. It has been rebuilt completely three times: in the middle-ages; around 1805 after the 1791 fire; and in 1871. The existing church remains mostly unaltered since then, with the exception of the additions of the vestry in 1897, and the Priests' Vestry and the Sussex spire in 1923. In order for the building to survive it needs to address the present requirements and aspirations of the parish. There is a need to expand the church and provide new facilities that allow its use into the 21st century, creating a viable and sustainable future.

The DCC contacted every church member regarding the use of the building and its future and 88 chose to take part in a survey. The results enabled us to understand their views on the building and, from this, develop a vision for its future. The church community are seeking opportunities to deepen its own understanding of God's word, and share that understanding with neighbours, with a view to growing the number of disciples in Speldhurst. An improved building would be of great use in this endeavour. We aspire to meet the needs of the growing church by providing:

- Four meeting spaces (there are currently only two), to accommodate our youth and children's groups, alongside Sunday services and host a range of other meetings throughout the week.
- Two of the spaces to be provided by creating one large space with a movable partition wall. This would give the option of either two meeting rooms for simultaneous use, or a single meeting room, large enough for up to 40 people. These rooms would operate independently of the church, allowing multiple use of the whole building.
- One of the rooms to be configured in a manner that, when required, facilitates work with vulnerable people, i.e. it has access to a dedicated toilet and tea station.
- A kitchen, suitable for entertainment and simple food provision, but not a full catering service. This must have easy access both to the main body of the church and the larger meeting room.
- A tea station in the main body of the church, for use after services and at events such as a weekday cafe.
- Toilet facilities, with disabled access, that can be accessed independently from either the church or the new meeting rooms.
- A space for flexible worship within the body of the church, which is large enough for 60 or more people,

and which can also be used for meals and other events.

- New AV equipment

This project is ongoing and will require a major investment to bring to fruition – with current estimates of around £1m.

St Mary's Speldhurst – Financial Information

St Mary's has a healthy financial position. Income is mostly from members of the congregation around 80 of whom make regular Gift Aided donations. This income enables us to pay our contribution to the Diocese, the cost of church services, the upkeep of our large churchyard, which is still available for burials, secretarial/admin expenses and other regular costs.

The balance sheet shows a General Fund of £213,498, having benefited from an unusually large legacy in 2022. St Mary's reserves policy is to maintain a General Fund balance of not less than 4 months' normal expenditure, ie about £44,000. The current General Fund total is well in excess of this, but some may be spent on the re-ordering project, for which architects' fees of £6,420 were paid in 2022/2023.

At 31 December 2023, £20,389 was held in the Church Repair Fund (unrestricted designated), having used £26,820 from this fund in 2023 to replace the heating boiler, which had served its useful life, and £4,340 for roof repairs. The £1,744 in restricted funds comprises various small amounts donated for specific use. It is our policy to donate 10% of our normal General Fund income to charities, some local, some UK and some working overseas.

In the past two years, St Mary's paid for essential safety work and for the utility bills and insurance for Speldhurst Chapel since it ceased to be used by Tonbridge Baptist Church, and from September 2022 to September 2023 St Mary's rented the building from the owners. During this time the building continued to be used by some of St Mary's groups. This provided the time needed for the village to get together a plan for its future use for the village community and St Mary's involvement in the Chapel finances ceased in September 2023 when Speldhurst Community Shop Ltd took on responsibility for the building.

A summary of the accounts is given below. Note that there are no separate published accounts for St Mary's. The published report and accounts for the current Parish of Speldhurst with Groombridge and Ashurst are available on request or from the Charity Commission website (registered charity number 1128599).

General Fund - Income & Expenditure Account for the year to 31st December 2023

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
INCOME - ALL FUNDS				
Planned giving	107,271		115,325	
Service collections	5,866		5,776	
Other donations	846	113,983	1,095	122,196
Fees received	3,400		5,353	
Investment income	6,267		4,157	
Other income	9,606	19,273	3,277	12,787
		133,256		134,983
Less income due to other funds		-5,780		-3,706
Normal income of the General Fund		127,475		131,277
less: EXPENDITURE - ALL FUNDS				
Away giving	12,462		13,888	
Contribution to central Parish costs	74,979		85,512	
Youth and outreach	2,716		731	
Church service costs, fuel & organists' fees	37,028		4,230	
Church & organ repairs & maintenance & insurance	13,180		7,114	
Churchyard upkeep	2,264		15,907	
Chapel expenditure	3,570		2,836	
Other costs	6,205		4,991	
	152,404		135,209	
Less costs borne by other funds		-33,985		-3,187
Normal expenses of the General Fund		118,419		132,022
Surplus/(deficit) of normal income over expenditure		9,057		-745
Transfer to Diocesan Repair Fund		-4,000		-1,000
Surplus/(deficit) of normal income over expenditure		5,057		-1,745
Legacies		0		49,036
Non normal expenses				
Re-ordering Expenses	-720		-5,700	
Donation to Diocesan Fund covid	0		0	
Teaching/training/mission	0		-360	
Project contingencies	0		0	
Costs borne by other funds	0		0	
Exceptional expenses charged to the General Fund		-720		-6,060
Surplus/(deficit) of income over expenditure		4,337		41,231
Gain/(loss) on investments - realised and unrealised		11,757		-16,445
Overall surplus/(deficit) for the year		16,094		24,786
Balance brought forward 1 January 2021		197,404		172,618
Balance carried forward at 31 December 2021		<u>£213,498</u>		<u>£197,404</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2023

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed Assets				
Investments		135,632		123,875
Current Assets				
Debtors	14,245		8,103	
Short term deposits	106,413		130,265	
Cash at bank and in hand	1,043		1,150	
		121,701		139,518
Liabilities:				
Amounts falling due within one year	-20,223		-13,269	
Amounts falling after one year			-4903	
Net Current Assets		101,478		121,346
Total Net Assets		237,110		245,221
Funds				
Unrestricted		213,498		197,404
Unrestricted Designated		20,389		46,619
Restricted		3,223		1,198
		£237,110		£245,221

St Mary's Church

S P E L D H U R S T

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