



St Lawrence, Bidborough



St Peter, Southborough

Tower & Steeple Parish Profile 2025

www.towerandsteeple.org

Parish Profile 2025

welcome and summary



Welcome to our parish profile for the “Tower and Steeple” parish of St Lawrence, Bidborough, and St Peter’s, Southborough. We are delighted you have opened this document and hope it will give you a flavour of our two churches - who we are, what we stand for, our mission to the communities we serve, the challenges and opportunities we face. We are praying for an engaging, energetic person to take on the role of rector who will impart their own style of preaching and leadership, helping us into new areas of growth, with an emphasis on outreach to young people whilst maintaining the solid link we have with Bidborough CofE Primary School.

St Lawrence (“The Tower”) is an iconic, medieval building with far-reaching views over open countryside. It serves the large residential village of Bidborough, which recently celebrated its 800th anniversary with a full-scale internal refurbishment. The church is a focal point in the life of the village, touching the lives of all age and social groups, spiritually and pastorally. Its worship style is traditional with a modern ‘feel’.

St Peter’s (“The Steeple”), founded in the 1830s, is the original large, light, open Victorian church, strategically situated next to the cricket green in Southborough and with good parking. It is a familiar sight to the many who drive along the A26 between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. The small but committed family congregation offers an informal, contemporary style of worship and serves the residential and business community of the town.

Our patron is CPAS, highlighting our alignment with the evangelical tradition. This is seen in the importance given to the preaching of the word and the deepening of our faith through daily ZOOM morning prayer.

Our new rector will have a heart for evangelism and some experience in helping churches grow, will relate to people of all ages with a particular enthusiasm for bringing children and younger people into church. He/she will be able to explain the gospel confidently and keen to support existing and new opportunities for outreach within the parish and beyond; he/she will want to place great emphasis on the power of prayer and be mindful of good pastoral care.

The post is full-time and accommodation is offered in a large 1960s 5-bedroom rectory adjacent to St Lawrence church which, in turn, is a 5 minute drive or a 20 minute walk by field common and woodland to St Peter’s.

We are grateful to you for looking through this profile. Please be assured that we are praying for God’s blessing on you as you discern God’s call to your next parish.

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Our Worshipping Community

Our parish has two worship centres, comprising regular Sunday attendance of around 70-80 adults and 30 children; the electoral roll is 125. We have families with young children, commuters to London from Tonbridge as well as the early and later retired. Less well represented are younger 20-something adults, often casualties of unaffordable housing in the parish we serve. We combine rural with leafy suburban, including the local farming community.

St Lawrence ('The Tower') is the oldest church in the Tunbridge Wells area and an iconic medieval church on the high sandstone outcrop in the middle of the village of Bidborough and became a parish in 1218. Erasmus preached here on occasion. Its 800th anniversary was marked with a major refurbishment and re-ordering to accommodate toilet facilities, new heating and lighting systems, kitchen/meeting area and state-of-the-art audio-visual technology.



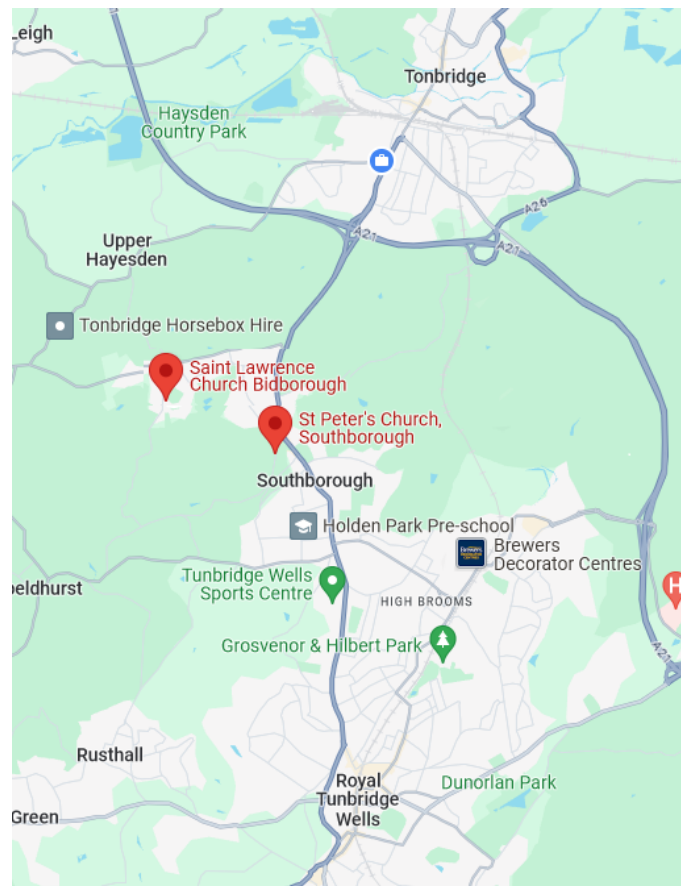
St Peter's ('Steeple'), a Decimus Burton building and the original parish church of Southborough, was founded in 1830 and represents a large worship space and a wonderful setting with potential for both church and community events with a small but faithful congregation and offering a more informal worshipping style.

Where are we?

Size and composition of Parish

Both the village of Bidborough and the town of Southborough lie between the towns of Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, the centre of gravity being more towards Tonbridge. Access to the A21 is immediate and leads on to the M25 at junction 5, a little beyond the Sevenoaks turn-off, and straight on to the Dartford Tunnel (north), to Gatwick and Heathrow airports travelling west and to Dover and the Channel Tunnel going east. Trains from Tonbridge are very frequent into London via London Bridge, Charing Cross and Cannon St (every 15 minutes). There are good train and road links to the south coast.

Bidborough is a village community (the 2021 census reported a population of 1,084 (of which 646 identify as 'C of E'), with a well-stocked village store, a well used village hall, a popular 'gastro pub' and garage at its heart. There is a large recreational field, with a cricket club and pavilion, a bowls club, tennis court and a recently renovated children's playground. The excellent Bidborough Church of England Primary School is adjacent and St Lawrence has a strong relationship with the school and headmistress which enables rooms at the school to be used for Sunday children's groups. From Bidborough Ridge, there are views north across the Weald of Kent and from St Lawrence a superb panoramic view across the depths of West Sussex and beyond. St Lawrence is situated on the Wealdway footpath and is often visited by walkers; our visitor's book fills up quickly.



Southborough is a town of 15,000, served by four Anglican churches and other denominations. St Peter's can be found to the north of the town. In terms of make-up of the population in both communities, 23% are in the age range of 1-17, 54% are in the 18-64 age group and 23% over 65; overseas nationals represent a little over 10% of the local population. The Southborough Civic Centre (the 'Hub') has opened in the last few years and offers halls, a library, surgery, pharmacy and a Town Square that provides a focal point that for many years the town lacked, including a weekly Saturday market.

We look forward to our next incumbent celebrating St Peter's 200th anniversary in 2030. The toilet area has recently been refurbished and, although the building is large to maintain, it is spacious enough to accommodate several hundred people and our churchwardens and other volunteers keep it in as good a shape as finances allow. Forest Sunday School and Forest Church often take place outside here and the churchyard contains rare plant species with the potential for developing it as a nature garden. There is also a curate's house in Southborough, owned jointly by St Peter's and Christchurch, Southborough, which is currently rented out commercially.



The incumbent will be ably assisted by a small team of volunteers – four churchwardens, two from each church, two licensed lay ministers and a PTO retired clergyman who resides in the parish. We are a single parish, single PCC, drawn from both churches, two very different buildings and two very different communities that work very well together. There are no other salaried or part-paid posts.

Church structure and worship pattern on Sundays:

- 8:00 am BCP communion, alternating between the two churches
- 9:30 am St Peter's morning worship with songs led by a small worship band or on video screen; Holy Communion is the first Sunday of the month. Youth and other children go out to Forest Sunday School on the 2nd Sunday; children meet for other activities on the first and fourth Sunday.
- 11:00am St Lawrence morning prayer with hymns led on a clavichord (soon to be a fully-functioning Eminent organ with three manuals). Holy Communion is on the second Sunday; children meet for other activities on the first and fourth Sunday.
- 15:00pm Monthly Forest Church – a short time of worship and an all-age talk in church before spending time outside enjoying God's creation with activities and crafts. Afternoon Forest Church alternates between churches.
- 18:30pm St Lawrence evening service, common worship with hymns. Evening prayer on the first Sunday and Holy Communion on the third Sunday

Weekday ZOOM morning prayer

A small group used to meet in the nave at St Lawrence for 30 minutes of bible verse, reflection and prayer. The pandemic forced us to abandon this and, subsequently, a larger group met via ZOOM which has continued every weekday since.



**Forest Church On the
“Bomb crater Field”**

What's going on – life in the parish and outreach

From badminton to the Gardening Association and Drama Society, there is a raft of social activities and something for everyone. Bidborough has a new, lively Parish Council that looks after the interests of the community. The Warders Medical Centre is located both in north Tonbridge and Penshurst, the St Andrews Medical Centre can be found in Southborough and the modern Tunbridge Wells hospital at Pembury, which opened in 2011, to the east is 15 minutes drive.

There are over 40 primary and secondary schools/academies in the Tonbridge area, ranging from grammar, technical and independent schools. Penshurst Place has a thriving 20-stall Farmer's market on the first Saturday of the month offering local produce and fresh fish brought up from the south coast.

Small (home) groups.

In all we have nine groups, comprising 50-60 people meeting fortnightly or monthly to study the bible, encourage and challenge one another in the daily life of discipleship. Groups use a variety of material, on occasion we all follow the same theme as our preaching series in church. We also run Lent courses and Alpha courses using the new flexible space of St Lawrence's south aisle.

Tots & Co.

Our parent-toddler group meets on a Friday in the village hall and is a great entry-point into the community for young families. Tots & Co. holds Easter, summer and Christmas services at St Lawrence.



CAMEO lunches

'Come And Meet Each Other' lunches are held at the village hall in Bidborough every two months with a dedicated team offering a meal and hospitality to 30-40 folk in the community. As well as running lunches, the pastoral team provide care and support for any in our churches and communities who need that extra touch of God's love.



The 'South Aisle' Café

A recent 'coffee and cake' venture made possible by the re-ordering of St Lawrence (completed in 2020); this is now a regular feature of the week on a Tuesday morning in the gathering space in our south aisle. Many attendees are given lifts to church. New activities such as a Mahjong club

have started and a monthly Singalong session is planned.



‘Fourth Friday’ Youth Club – Fellowship Afloat

New since 2023, a monthly Youth Club at St Lawrence with 20 or so secondary school age children meeting for games, fellowship and some encouragement in faith. This has, in turn, led to a return of an annual excursion of 30 youngsters spending a fun-filled week-end living on board an ex-lightship on the Essex coast, sailing, climbing and hearing testimonies from the young Christian helpers/ supervisors on the team. This has been a real success and a highlight of the year for youngsters.



The MOB (Men of Bidborough), now MOBS (Men of Bidborough and Southborough)

MOB/MOBS has in the past met regularly, either over conversation (Table Talk), over a drink at The Kentish Hare, a summer’s walk, a meal with a guest speaker, a gentle cycle ride through the lanes of Kent and Sussex, a round of golf. Sadly, these activities went into abeyance as a consequence of the pandemic but we hope to start a new programme again shortly.



PALS (St Peter’s and St Lawrence Ladies)

A group of ladies around the parish meet every month for a walk from one church to the other and back for coffee. A bi-monthly book club has developed from this and, occasionally, PALS holds breakfasts with Christian speakers.



BLINK (Bidborough-Kibaigwa Link)

Some years ago, a link was forged between Bidborough and a market town in Tanzania. Exchanges took place and we were involved in projects with schools, a disability centre and an environmental project. Sadly, around the time of the pandemic, our BLINK committee chairman died, and other key figures moved away from Bidborough. BLINK is ripe for a new vision and for new relationships to be developed.



A number of Church family members support children overseas through the **Compassion** charity. Some of these children are in Tanzania, others spread in countries across the world.

Christmas

Again this year the Forest church team will lead a nativity play in the barn complex of the local Four Winds farm with live sheep taking part; at St Peter's we fill the church for the Christingle service on Christmas Eve. The choir leads carols by candlelight at St Lawrence. We also have carol singing in the open air and a wind band which attracts extended family groups (and dogs)



Operation Christmas Child – Samaritan's Purse

At the end of every year a number of church volunteers give of their time to packing shoeboxes, with some taking on host/supervisor roles, filling them with toys, which are then wrapped up and sent off in bulk to selected countries of the world. The boxes are distributed during December to children as Christmas gifts



New Wine

After a 'pandemic break', members of the two churches were back at New Wine, albeit a smaller group than in previous years. A time of great fellowship and encouragement amongst the hardy campers in the parish.

Bidborough Church of England Primary School

Vision
**'Faith in
our Future'**

Values
Love, Hope, Courage
Forgiveness
Koinonia



Bidborough School has had close links with St Lawrence Church ever since the school was founded by people from the church and parish in the 1850s. The 'Old School' is used by Reception Class and years 1-6 are in the buildings built and added to since the 1960s. The school is one form entry and is Voluntary Controlled.

Foundation Governors

The incumbent is a Governor at the school with two further Foundation Governors, one appointed by the PCC and one by Rochester Diocesan Board of Education. The Foundation Governors sit on the "Faith and Flourishing" committee and oversee matters relating to wellbeing, behaviour and the Christian ethos of the school.

Collective Worship

The school has a strong tradition of worship and singing, assemblies are held most days. The incumbent leads one of the midweek times of Collective Worship; there is a worship group made up of pupils from across the school who review and plan assemblies together with teachers. The children come up to church for special events throughout the year and we hold a Leavers' service for Year 6 each summer.



S.I.A.M.S

The school was rated 'Outstanding' at the last Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools in 2017.

What do we believe?



The patron of our parish is the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), both St. Peter's and St Lawrence have their roots in the protestant, evangelical and 'low' church tradition (St Peter's so much so that that the front of the church is orientated west rather than east).

We would broadly agree with CPAS's Basis of Faith (<http://www.cpas.org.uk/basis-faith-0>) and with that of the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) available here – (<http://ceec.info/basis-of-faith>).

In a survey taken by the PCC recently, all those who responded agreed that our church 'should be welcoming to all, regardless of class, colour or sexual orientation, as together we come to know and love the Jesus we meet in Scripture' and also that 'the church, locally and nationally, should lament and repent of any failure to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people, or any other group in society'.

Over 90% of the PCC agreed that 'the teaching of Scripture and the historic witness of the church, is that marriage is understood to be the lifelong union between a man and a woman' and that 'the teaching of the Bible and the church is that the proper place for God-given sexual relationships is within marriage'.

The PCC was unanimous in agreeing that 'the church should be a place where people with different views can find a home and unite around a compelling vision for worship and mission'.

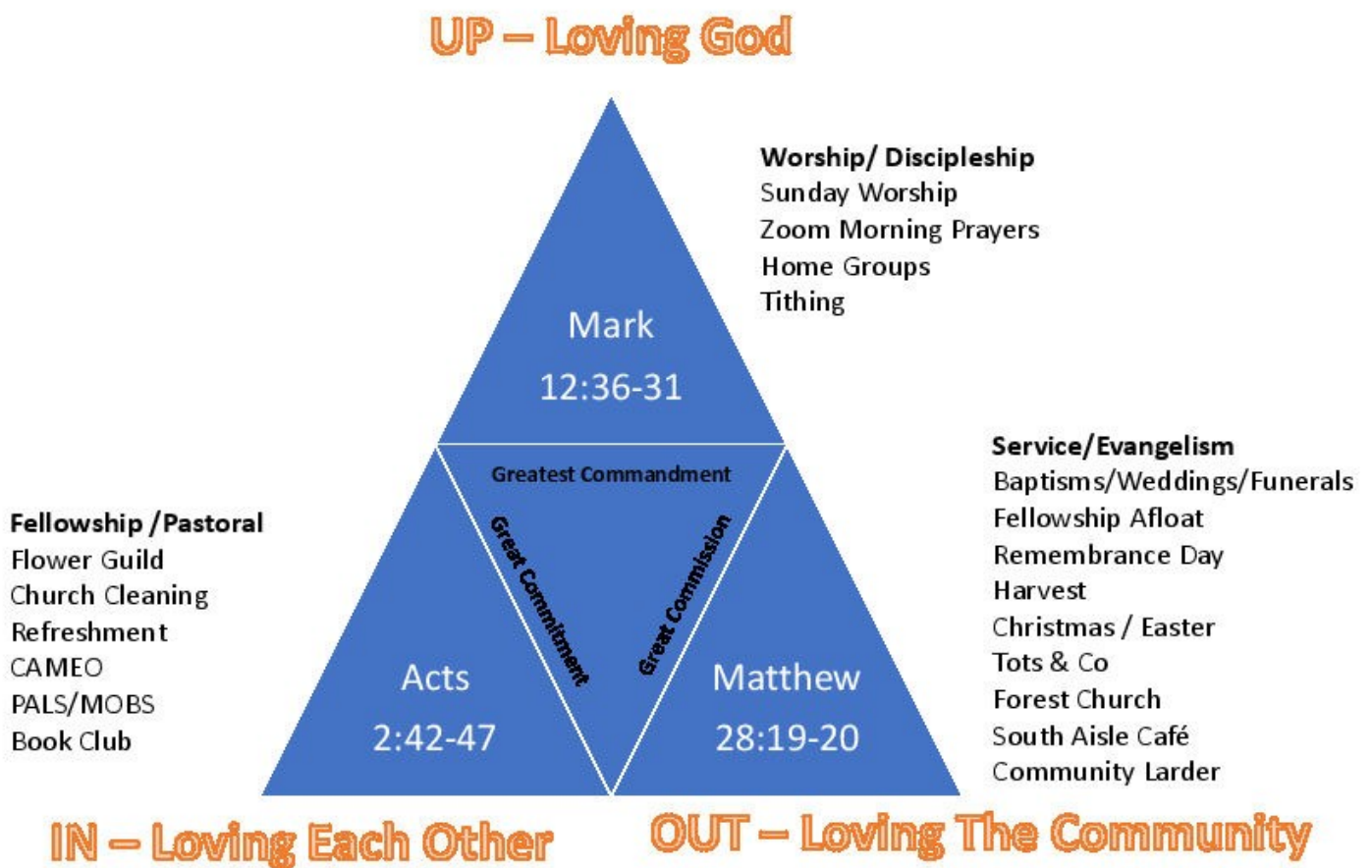
It is in that spirit of unity in worship and mission that we look forward to working through some of the challenging issues that face the church with our new incumbent, as Synod continue to discuss and work on guidance relating to marriage and family life, and the pastoral implications of ministering in a diverse 21st century society.



Where are we going? Vision and Values

Our vision as a Tower and Steeple parish and people 'To Love God and To Love People' is rooted in The Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31), The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and The Great Commitment (Acts 2:42-47). This we find is expressed in the triangular dimensions of 'UP' (Loving God in worship and prayer), 'IN' (Loving each other in fellowship and pastoral care) and 'OUT' (Loving the community through outreach and evangelism) .

We look forward to working together with our new incumbent to further develop our Vision, Values and Mission Action Plan in the years ahead.



Challenges and Opportunities

The parish is largely residential and the area has a considerable number of primary and secondary schools which attract families with young children and teenagers. We would like to build on our outreach to families so that their children can be 'rooted and grounded' in the love of Jesus from a very young age.

The immediate challenge is to reach out and appeal to more of our local community, the 95% who do not go to church; to become a church of all social backgrounds, age and income groups; to go further in identifying and encouraging new licensed lay ministers readers (we have a person pursuing the Bishop's Certificate) and to finding those who are already members of the church to step up in various roles, and to attract more late-teens/20-somethings to join our respective churches.

As each year passes, we lose older folk; retired people, who have been resident for some time in the respective communities and often associated with the church, begin to move away to be nearer their families. There is an influx of new families who naturally wish to send their children to the primary school in Bidborough, but the challenge St Lawrence faces is to attract and direct these new families into regular church services and their children into youth groups which we have been finding difficult. That said, much progress has been made with Forest Church which, without question, draws in parents with their children.

Whom are we looking for?

- An enthusiastic bible-based teacher, preacher and leader, equipped by the Holy Spirit, who can demonstrate a concern for pastoral matters and a heart for evangelism;
- An incumbent who will work with us, someone who can help us strengthen our children's ministry and draw young people to faith, who will work with us to develop a vision of growth for the future;
- A 'missional disciple' of Jesus Christ, who fashions their life around that of Jesus and invites others to become His disciples;
- A person of prayer and a worship leader who is comfortable working across a range of liturgical styles and seeks to keep worship fresh and relevant;
- A leader who will discern and encourage the gifts and callings of all of God's people in this place and help us find and exercise the ministries that God has called each of us to;
- Technically savvy, but not plugged into technology 24/7;
- A person who will enjoy working with us and who values joy in ministry; someone who is approachable, hospitable and relates well to all ages.



What can we offer you?

- A full-time stipendiary post
- You will have the support of four churchwardens, two Licensed Lay Ministers and a PTO retired clergyman who lives in the parish, a PCC, comprising members of both churches, which meets 5 times a year and a number of others who lead and support other ministries;
- You will be encouraged to take sabbath time during the week and year and to attend conferences/retreats that will refresh and resource you for ministry
- The PCC will cover your ministry expenses, and any appropriate training that you feel will enhance your work among us here.

Where will you live?

The Rectory, Bidborough



A 5-bedroomed house built in the 1960s, when Rectory Drive was created on land of the former 17th century Rectory which is directly opposite. The kitchen was renovated about 10 years ago. The house is situated in a generous plot that has a tree-lined garden and which backs on to

the churchyard with rear doors leading on to a broad patio area. A pathway below the garden provides flat access to the north entrance to the church and is often

used by elderly parishioners who would otherwise find the walk up from the lychgate by the High Street somewhat of a challenge. The property also offers a garage with small workshop available at the back with attached greenhouse.

Bidborough Primary School is just down the hill beyond the church into Spring Lane.

Ivy Cottage

St Lawrence has access to Ivy Cottage, a building donated in 1910 by a London spinster for the use by and benefit of members of the church. The building is currently empty after the recent retirement of the verger and his family after 30 years in post. Potentially a resource for the church, it is in great need of complete refurbishment and upgrading throughout.

Quinquennials:

The Rectory is due a quinquennial and has been subject to upgrading works by Rochester Diocese and their contractors since being vacated by the previous incumbent;

St Lawrence church scored spectacularly well in its 2022 quinquennial survey, unsurprising in that this followed the creation of the toilet extension and wider re-ordering (Project 800);

The report on **Ivy Cottage** (October 2022) makes clear there is a substantial amount of repair/renovation work to be done; quotes are being sought for work to be carried out.

St Peter's next quinquennial is due in October 2025.



What else would you like to know?



Safeguarding

The PCC aims to promote a safe culture within our church and takes seriously its duty to keep from harm all who are made welcome, especially children and vulnerable adults. The Safeguarding Policy is reviewed annually and the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard is used by the Parish Safeguarding Officer to ensure correct procedures are being followed, including Safeguarding programmes, training and DBS checks.

Finances

Our church family gives generously towards our ministry. We have in the past made our 'parish offer' to the Diocese in line with the expectations placed upon us. Our income/expenditure is in the region of £100,000 per annum. We also seek to 'tithes' from our income, some of which goes to national and international Christian aid agencies and some of which supports a wide range of local Christian initiatives. We have been operating at a small deficit for the past few years which has had the effect of reducing reserves. These, however, remain healthy.

A list of current organisations benefitting from parish tithing can be found in the appendix.

Diocese and Deaconry

The parish is in Rochester Diocese, within the Archdeaconry of Tonbridge and the Deanery of Tunbridge Wells. We also collaborate in an informal way with ACTS (Anglican Churches Together in Southborough) which includes the Christ Church and St Thomas churches in Southborough.



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

Message from the Bishop of Rochester

Welcome to the Diocese of Rochester and thank you for your interest in this exciting role. Our parishes and congregations are the beating heart of the Diocese and are central to our desire for churches to flourish and God's kingdom to grow across all our wonderfully diverse communities.

Our vision

As a Diocese we share the vision that we are Called Together **to change, serve and grow** the church across the areas of Medway, north and west Kent and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.

Much work has taken place to understand what these three themes mean for the life of the Diocese and our priorities, and to define what and where resources will need to be allocated to deliver them.

Through prayerful engagement and discernment, what has begun to emerge is an understanding that we are a community:

Seeking first the Kingdom of God, and called together by God to change, serve and grow with compassion, courage and creativity.

Change is about the need for us to adapt in a changing world, so that our churches can play their full part in serving God and drawing people once more to faith in Jesus Christ.

Serve is about the attitude we need to adopt if we are to earn and gain that cherished place in people's hearts and at the heart of our communities.

Grow is about what God wants to bring about in us and through us, as people growing into the likeness of Christ, and as churches where people are being drawn to follow Jesus through our words and through our deeds.

Our objectives

Within this overall vision, our emerging key objectives are to grow *missional churches, with missional leaders and missional disciples*, that are:

- Growing younger and more diverse,
- Growing numerically, spiritually, financially and in impacting their communities, and in turn are
- Creating a safe and healthy culture for all

This is the latest phase in developing our strategic plans, which are vital to our seeking to grow the kingdom of God across the areas of Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.

Central to these plans is sustaining and growing a flourishing and well-resourced parish structure, so as to enable our local churches to take their full and rightful place at the heart of their communities: serving God and serving the people, loving God and showing his love in and to our communities.

If this vision excites you and you believe God may be calling you to this role, then we would love to hear from you.

With my prayers and best wishes,

+Jonathan

**The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs
Bishop of Rochester**

Current listing of organisations St Lawrence/St Peter's tithes to 2024

Poverty and Hope
Christian Aid
Tearfund
Open Doors
Bidborough CofE School
Youth for Christ
Life and Soul
T/W Fellowship of Evangelicals
DAVSS
CPAS
MOSAIC Tunbridge Wells
Compassion for Jackson (St Lawrence)
Angel Studios
New Wine
Prison Fellowship
Hope Lebedyn Ukraine
Mercy Ships
Energise Youth (St Peter's)



Tithing amount is equivalent to 10% of the parish offer this year to Rochester Diocese.

