



**ST STEPHEN'S
TONBRIDGE**

WELCOME TO

**ST STEPHEN'S
CHURCH
TONBRIDGE**

PASSIONATE TO KNOW GOD AND TO MAKE GOD KNOWN

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

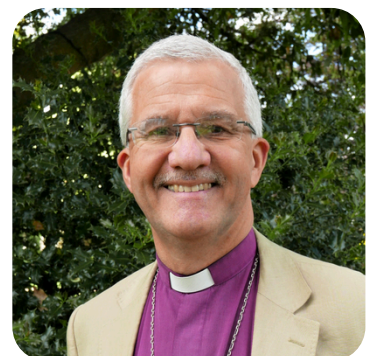
This is the latest phase in developing our strategic plans, which are vital to our seeking to grow the kingdom of God across the areas of Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.

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



WELCOME TO ST STEPHEN'S

We are delighted you have opened our Parish Profile and are interested in becoming our Associate Vicar. I hope that this parish profile gives you a feel for what St Stephen's is about: who we are, what we do, and how we want to deepen our faith, bless our community and grow the Kingdom of God in this place. You may well have other questions though and we would love to invite you to visit, but you can also find out more about us on our website - www.ststephens.org.uk

We are the Parish Church for South Tonbridge and we have a vision to be a church that is passionate to know God and to make God known.

It has been a real privilege to have been Vicar here for the past 20 years and I am looking forward to welcoming a new colleague to our team as we continue to work towards our vision, discipling and caring for our congregation and deepening our links with members of our local community.

You would be joining us at a particularly exciting time as we approach the second year of our 5-year strategic plan with the aim of growing deeper, wider and younger.

In early 2023 we asked consultants from UCAN (UK Church Administrator's Network) to review our organisational health and operational effectiveness. The review identified "a genuine desire for the church to fulfil its mission and vision" but also "a lack of clarity concerning where the church is aiming in the short and mid-term." Since then our leadership team and PCC have put a significant amount of work into improving this focus and we have set out on our exciting journey with a plan to help us fulfil our vision.

We are a welcoming, family friendly and busy church situated at the heart of the community of South Tonbridge, catering to a wide range of ages. New Wine has influenced our theology, worship, openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, and our practice over many years, but we value and respect a wide range of backgrounds and theological approaches. Our three services are predominately informal but sufficiently distinct to accommodate a broad spectrum of worshipping styles. We also have a history of thriving youth and children's work with a series of Sunday and mid-week groups and an annual opportunity for our young people to go away together and experience a deeper level of teaching and fellowship.

Our engagement with the local community spans across all ages, from an active ministry in our local care homes, our Living Well café (open three days a week and hosting a number of support agencies), growing relationships with our local schools and a popular OFSTED registered pre-school.

We have had a good relationship with the Diocese over many years, seeking to pay our parish share in full (although finances post-pandemic has meant that we have not quite managed to do so over the last couple of years but have plans to rectify this), and are included in a Strategic Bid that the Diocese is preparing to submit early in 2025 focussed on Youth & Children and the Church of England's vision to grow younger.

We recognise the potential for growth across all ages and are confident that through prayer, God's provision of the right people and the direction set out in our strategic plan - to grow deeper, wider and younger - we can fulfil this over the coming years. We are looking forward to someone joining the team who is excited by this potential and has a particular heart for seeing God at work in families and young adults.

Mark Barker



OUR VISION FOR ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Our vision is to be a church that is passionate to know God and passionate to make God known. That means we want:

- everyone who is part of St Stephen's, whatever their age, to grow as spirit-filled disciples in their everyday lives; and
- everyone within the parish, whatever their age, to have the opportunity to hear the gospel within 5 years.

We aim to achieve this by creating a safe and healthy culture for all as we:

GROW DEEPER

DISCIPLESHIP

Being a disciple means following Jesus in our everyday lives. We want to encourage one another to grow in relationship with Him so that our lives will increasingly look more and more like Him.

WORSHIP

We believe that God really does deserve our worship. We want to encourage one another to grow in a lifestyle of worshipping God, personally and collectively, and expectant of encountering God.

GROW WIDER

COMMUNITY

God cares about all people. We want to find ways to reach into our wider community with the gospel, and as we do that, to see our wider community transformed. We aim to do this through ministries such as Living Well Tonbridge becoming more integrated within the spiritual and pastoral life of the church in a friendly, welcoming and accessible way.

EVANGELISM

We believe that knowing Jesus is the best thing ever, so we want to encourage, equip and support one another to feel confident in sharing our faith in whatever ways we can, wherever we find ourselves during the week. But we also want to do things together to spread the good news of Jesus in our wider community.



GROW YOUNGER

YOUNGER

We believe that everyone is loved, whatever their age. However, recognising that our church is getting older, we want to make sure that we are intentionally reaching families and people in their 20s and 30s, and better understand how they connect to God.

We have set out a 5-year strategic plan to help us achieve these aims. Over the first year we have been concentrating on making space, focusing our efforts on teaching and key activities that support our vision, but then our Associate Lay Ministers were selected to train for ordination which has been both a wonderful blessing and a great loss. As we move ahead into our second year with plans to expand our ministry to those in their 20s and 30s, develop our plans for schools' ministry, run Alpha courses and encourage our congregation in sharing their faith and developing their spiritual gifts, we are looking forward to welcoming an Associate Vicar who is inspired by our vision and eager to be part of our journey.

OUR VISION FOR OUR ASSOCIATE VICAR

Our hope and prayer is to appoint an Associate Vicar who has their own personal passion "to know God and to make God known" and a strong desire to work as part of a team committed to helping that passion to grow amongst the congregation here at St Stephen's.

The key focus of the role will be to help the church "grow younger", and so, to lead and develop our outreach among those in their 20s and 30s, we are in particular looking for someone with:

- a heart for encouraging discipleship and spreading the gospel to younger adults;
- an understanding of and experience in building relationships with this age group;
- the ability to develop and lead a new worshipping community;
- experience of building, inspiring, leading and equipping teams; and
- the management experience to successfully oversee and co-ordinate those areas of ministry relating to young adults and their families. This would include line managing the pre-school and youth and children's work.

In addition, we hope this person would have:

- a strong personal prayer life;
- a down to earth but compassionate approach to a diverse range of people whatever their situation or age;
- the ability to provide inspiring Biblically-based teaching and leadership;
- a heart for those who are struggling;
- integrity and humility; and
- a naturally collaborative and team-based approach to ministry.

We recognise that any individual comes with their own gifts and passions (e.g. worship, creativity etc), and we would look to help the person appointed to this role to use these within the wider strategy and vision of the church.

OUR COMMUNITY

The town of Tonbridge is in the beautiful countryside that forms the Weald of Kent, mid-way between London and the South Coast of England. London is 30 miles to the north whilst Hastings, on the coast to the south, is also 30 miles. The town has a mainline railway station giving fast and regular services to the coast and into London. With the M25, M2 and M20 motorways not far away, Tonbridge has become a popular and growing commuter town.

With a 12th century castle, extensive parks, swimming pool, leisure centre, sports clubs, cafes and restaurants, Tonbridge has plenty to offer. The usual mix of supermarkets and shops can be found on and around the High Street, although for larger stores and chains it is necessary to travel to Tunbridge Wells or Bluewater. Tonbridge is also well served by many schools, details of which are provided at the end of this document.

The Parish of St. Stephen's is situated in the south end of Tonbridge with a rising population of approximately 15,600 people (2021 census), although it is estimated that about 15,000 people are added to this number each school day. The age split of the parish population is 0-4 years (6.4%), 5-14 (12.4%), 15-19 (5.1%), 20-34(20.5%), 35-64 (41.8%) 65+ (13.8%). The parish is mainly residential, although there are areas of light industry. St. Eanswythe's mission, a small chapel which became part of the parish in 2015 is situated some half mile from the main church, and South Tonbridge is also served by three other churches; a URC, a free evangelical and a strict Zion Baptist. In addition, a mosque has recently opened within the parish.



OUR CHURCH

St Stephen's was built in 1852 after the coming of the railway to Tonbridge led to a significant expansion of the population at the southern end of the town.

Over the past 20 years we have undertaken considerable refurbishment of the main church building. This has included the removal of all the pews, installation of new flooring, heating, seating, lighting, audio visual and sound systems and the introduction of kitchen facilities. This has created a great flexible and light space which is extensively used throughout the week.

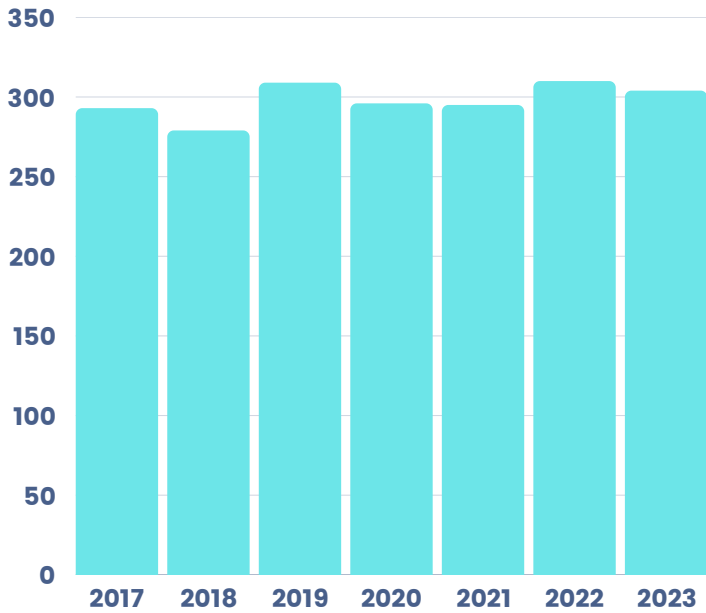
In 2015 we took on responsibility for the congregation and buildings of St Eanswythe's Mission, which had been set up as an independent chapel in 1890 and until this point had been overseen by a Missioner, appointed by the St Eanswythe's Trust. The chapel, which is about 10 minutes' walk away from St Stephen's, was completely rebuilt in 2006 and now comprises a small modern hall, with 3 flats above it. These flats and the old Missioner's house are currently rented out, although the PCC has recently taken the decision in principle to sell these buildings and use the proceeds to help develop our mission across the whole parish.



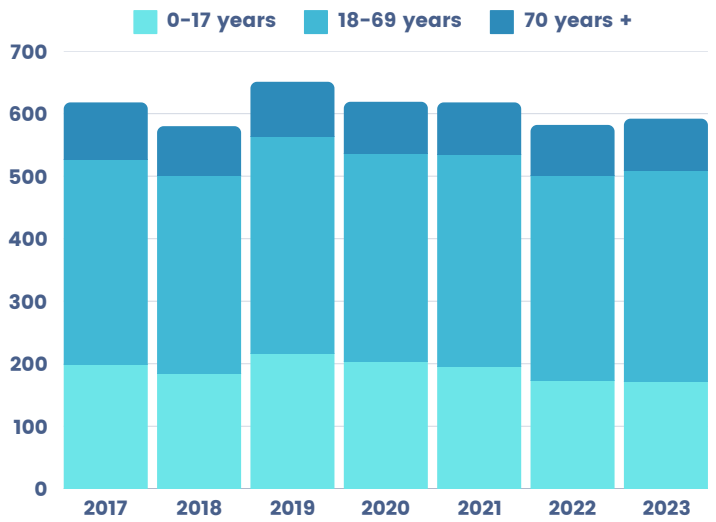
ST EANSWYTHE'S

OUR CONGREGATION

ELECTORAL ROLL



WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY



Source	11 to 17 %	18 to 25 %	26 to 35 %	36 to 50 %	51 to 64 %	65 to 75 %	Over 75 %	Base (=100%)
St Stephen's 2024 Survey	10	2	8	20	26	26	8	235
St Stephen's 2012 Survey	7	9	13	24	24	14	9	176
Church of England 2022	5	3	6	8	26	29	23	984,000
Population 2021	9	11	15	23	21	12	9	49.4 mn

OUR TEAM

Our current team of paid workers comprises the Vicar, Youth & Children's Pastor, an operational team including the Ops Manager, Church & Finance Manager, Premises Manager, Assistant Church Administrator and Caretaker and our Pre-school team, including the Manager, Deputy, 8 practitioners and an administrator.

We are very fortunate to be supported by two dedicated and able churchwardens who are actively involved in the vision, planning and practical application of church life, and also a number of key volunteers, including our Community Engagement Lead, who heads up Living Well Tonbridge, those who lead services at St Eanswythe's, our Youth & Children's Core team leaders, the Chaplains who head up our Care Homes Ministry, our Treasurer, the Chair of our Mission Action Group and our Parish Safeguarding Officer. They are ably supported by around 150 other volunteers, who enable our Services and ministry to flourish.

Our governance is overseen by a PCC of 15 members who meet 6 times a year, supported by various Resource Support Groups responsible for Risk, HR, Safeguarding, St Stephen's Pre-school (STEPS), Mission support and our Standing Committee.

We are part of TACT (the Tonbridge & Area Churches Together), with the church leaders meeting monthly to catch up and pray together, and some of the team also go to the local New Wine network gatherings.



OUR CLERGY HOUSE

Our accommodation for Associate Clergy is a Victorian three bed semi-detached house, situated on a friendly residential street 5 minutes' walk from the church.

Downstairs there is a sitting room (with an open fireplace), a study, dining room, kitchen and a large cupboard under the stairs. Upstairs there are three good sized bedrooms and a bathroom. The back garden is around 70 ft long and there is off road parking for two cars at the front.

There is double glazing throughout the house and gas central heating, powered by a relatively new boiler.

The house is within easy walking distance of the town centre, railway station and local park and there are a number of highly rated pre-schools, nurseries, primary and secondary schools nearby (see last page for more information).



1 is St Stephen's Church, 2 is St Eanswythe's Mission and 3 is the Clergy House.



OUR MINISTRIES

Our ministries, are focussed under our strategy to grow deeper, to grow wider and to grow younger.

GROWING DEEPER

Early in 2024 over 240 people completed a discipleship survey, and the results were very encouraging with an average score of 8.2 out of 10 to the question “how would you rate your passion to know God”. 91% of those who responded also said that they felt that they were growing in the Fruit of the Spirit, while 71% said that they prayed daily and 52% said that they read the Bible either daily or weekly.

The survey also highlighted that a significant percentage of our congregation have been Christians for more than 20 years so there continues to be real need to spread the good news in our community and to provide opportunities for developing the lives of newer Christians as they deepen their relationship with God.

WORSHIP

Over the years St Stephens has been blessed with a thriving clergy team. This allowed us to run weekly services at 9.30am, 10.30am and 6.30pm on Sundays and a service of Holy Communion each Wednesday morning at 11am. As clergy have retired or moved on the team has got smaller and we have had to reduce the number of services we can offer. Since the pandemic we have been running the following services:

9.30am @ St Eanswythe's *

A traditional but not too formal service, using Common Worship and following a style enjoyed by the original St Eanswythe's congregation, which has also attracted a few members from St Stephen's. It runs twice a month (usually the first and third Sunday), with a member of clergy providing Holy Communion once a month and a small team of lay people leading the alternate service. Attendance is around 15-20 and the demographic is predominantly older.

10.30am @ St Stephen's

An informal weekly service, with worship bands and which is livestreamed over YouTube. Holy Communion is celebrated once a month and groups for our youth and children run most weeks. Attendance is around 180 and as our main service, this attracts a wide range of ages, especially families.

6.30pm Plugged-In @ St Stephen's

We currently hold these services once a month, although our aim is to be able to run them more regularly. The style of worship is aimed at attracting those in their 20s and 30s and is more informal and interactive than the 10.30am service. Refreshments are available from 6pm and are followed by worship, Bible teaching and interviews. This service was set up and run by our Associate Lay Ministers and would be a key area of ministry for our new Associate Vicar.

*With the potential sale of St. Eanswythe's, it is planned that this service will move to St. Stephen's in Autumn 2025, but before that we will be reviewing all our service times.



LIFE EVENTS

Baptism & Confirmation

Infant baptism or thanksgiving are celebrated during our 10.30am service, generally on a monthly basis. In 2024 we have baptised 13 children, young people and adults. At least once a year we offer baptism by immersion and the opportunity for confirmation.

Weddings and Funerals

We have also had the privilege of being involved in weddings and funerals, and an Associate Vicar will get involved in these, but we do not have many – 2024 saw 2 weddings and 8 funerals.



CONNECT (HOME) GROUPS

We believe that deepening our discipleship is key to our vision to be passionate to know God. Whilst we aim through our services to equip and encourage people in their discipleship journey with an emphasis on personal application, we recognise the importance too of small groups in this area.

We have 16 connect (home) groups and just over half of our congregation are members of one. They meet on a variety of days and times, with some catering for particular ages or stages of life and others more mixed. People in connect groups tell us that they value the opportunity to study the Bible, pray for each other and deepen their relationship with Jesus. We would love to have more people in connect groups but recognise that pressures on people's time and difficulty in recruiting more leaders may mean that we need to look at other ways to encourage discipleship.

PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral care is carried out in many different ways at St Stephen's. Our connect groups and other small groups provide key places for pastoral care for many of our members. We also have volunteers who are happy to provide practical support, for instance to make meals when there is a new baby in a family or a period of illness.

The vicar heads up a team of three who meet regularly to consider specific pastoral issues and ensure that as far as possible all those in need are offered appropriate support.

Meanwhile our pastoral teams at each of our Living Well Sessions are developing trust and relationships with members of our community who come along. Whilst we can offer a listening ear and comfort ourselves, we are also able to signpost or introduce people to expert help when needed from the many organisations that use our church space. These include craft groups who are extremely welcoming to those who are lonely or anxious, a charity that helps those who are homeless, debt advice, support for those with autism, help with developing digital skills, support for parents and general support from Citizen's Advice.

We would always like to extend the pastoral care we can offer and one of the areas we would like to develop to help this is our welcome of new members of the church. We want to develop better ways of following up with newcomers so that we can get to know them more quickly and help them to feel supported and cared for from the beginning.

PRAYER

We are committed to building a deeper prayer life for St Stephens. We believe that God hears our prayer and that when we pray for ourselves or each other, then God can bring strength, encouragement, healing and hope.

Recognising that receiving and hearing answers to prayer encourages us all, we have for the past year been inviting people as part of our services to come and share an EDGE "Every Day God Encounter". We have had a very positive response including a number of people who have overcome a real fear of standing up front in order to tell their story.

We recently relaunched our prayer ministry team for services and have been encouraged by the number wanting to be involved in this area of church life. All members of the team are safely recruited and appropriately trained and all we ask of them is that they wear a name badge on a lanyard whenever they are at a service and available to offer prayer. We encourage members of the congregation to approach a member of the team or indeed anyone whom they feel comfortable praying with.

Our pastoral teams at our Living Well sessions also wear T-shirts with "Can I pray with You?" on them so that members of our community also know that there are people around who would be happy to pray with or for them.

We have a prayer chain who pray in answer to specific requests. The contact details for the leader of the chain are always provided in our Sunday "News and Notes" and people are encouraged to access this opportunity for prayer.

Once a month we provide an opportunity for the congregation to meet to pray together for an hour on a Sunday evening. Whilst numbers have been relatively low so far, we believe it is important for us as a body to encourage and provide opportunities for corporate prayer.

Of course, much prayer also goes on within small groups too, but this is definitely an area of church life we are seeking to develop over the coming years, encouraging our members of all ages to pray and to support each other in prayer, in expectation that we will see God working powerfully in our lives.



CREATION CARE

We believe strongly that caring for God's creation is an integral part of our discipleship and aim to put this at the heart of our ministries.

We are registered as an Eco Church with the international organisation A Rocha and have achieved our Bronze Award. We use Fairtrade products in our café and consider the environmental implication of the other products and equipment that we buy. Last year we changed bank accounts and now use the Co-Op bank, which has been recognised as a Which? Eco Provider for the last two years.

In 2022 we had an energy audit carried out under the auspices of the Church of England scheme and have been working to make changes to our buildings in response to the recommendations. We have gradually changed the majority of lighting within all our buildings to LED and last year completed the replacement of our main church lighting with LED bulbs. In addition to the positive impact on the environment this also reduced our electricity bill by around £800 per month and resulted in the Church of England making a short film of the changes we had made to encourage others to consider doing something similar. You can see the film [here](#). Future plans include the installation of solar panels on the church roof.

We also have a small but dedicated group of members who are passionate about improving our environment through the use of our outside spaces and who are developing an area of garden between the church hall and church office to encourage wildlife.



St Stephen's Church Tonbridge
CREATION CARE DECLARATION



GROWING WIDER

The Discipleship survey also showed that whilst there was a positive response of 7.3 out of 10 to the question “how would you rate your passion to make God known” there was much less confidence among members of the congregation about leading someone to faith. This is something we are keen to develop over the coming years, starting with a sermon series in 2025 focussed on sharing our faith.

Having previously run a series of Alpha courses, in 2024 we introduced our first course for those seeking to learn more about Jesus, based on the “Start to Stir” course. This course recognises that many people no longer have any grounding in faith or Christianity and assumes much less knowledge than the Alpha course. The feedback from our first course has been positive and we are reviewing it to see if there are areas where we could make improvements. However, we are aware that something further is needed to help lead people to a commitment, attendance at church and the regular encouragement in discipleship that we offer, and, dependent on the right leaders coming forward, we hope to launch Alpha again during 2025.



START TO STIR COURSE
AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN BASICS

- // DISCOVER YOUR SOUL //
- // CONNECT TO GOD //
- // ENCOUNTER JESUS //
- // LIVE FULL LIFE //



The Alpha Course

Alpha runs here
www.ststephens.org.uk/alpha

CARE HOME MINISTRY

We have a small but committed group of volunteers who provide spiritual and pastoral care to the older members of our community through opportunities for worship and support in local care homes, extra care housing and our Cottage Hospital. Our volunteers provide regular services (apart from at the Cottage Hospital) and we aim to provide a service of Communion each month. Our four chaplains lead the provision in each place and are supported by a team of caring and enthusiastic volunteers.

We have an especially close relationship with Tonbridge House, a care home just across the road from the church, and staff there regularly bring residents over to enjoy refreshments and company at our Living Well café.





Living Well Tonbridge serves as a community hub dedicated to supporting those who are isolated, disadvantaged, or vulnerable. Our mission is to open the doors of our church to everyone in the community, creating a warm and welcoming environment that offers friendship, fun, and practical assistance to those in need. We have built strong partnerships with various local agencies, which we host to facilitate their support services.

Hospitality is at the heart of our mission, and much of our activity revolves around our café, nestled in the beautiful surroundings of St. Stephen's. The café operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 1pm, offering tea, filter coffee, light lunches and delicious cakes. It serves as a gathering place for both church members and the broader community, providing a space for socializing, conversations, and pastoral support.

On Tuesdays, the café is open for visitors to drop in throughout the morning, participate in a craft group, engage with jigsaw puzzles, or connect with our pastoral team. Additionally, we host Tonbridge Citizen's Advice Bureau, Porchlight (the local homeless charity), Crosslight (debt advice), Babons (cancer support charity), Digital Skills support and our Local Councillors (monthly meetings).

Thursdays bring a lively play space for pre-school-aged children alongside the café, featuring a variety of toys and activities. This space is a favourite for parents and caregivers to connect while their little ones enjoy themselves. Our Youth & Children's Pastor incorporates Christian crafts, a Bible story, song time, and a reflective thought for the day during these sessions. Space2BeMe, a charity who focus on support families of disabled children, offer monthly support in these sessions.

On Saturday mornings from 10am to midday, we collaborate with FEAST (a local charity) to run a Community Larder, allowing families and individuals on low incomes to access fresh produce and groceries to take home. Our café is also open serving tea, filter coffee, and cakes. A knitting group meet each week, and once a month, the Tonbridge Repair Café team joins us from 10am to 12:30pm, offering repair services for electrical, mechanical, wooden, and textile items, as well as bike repairs and knife sharpening.



Feedback for Living Well Tonbridge

Before I became a councillor I had no idea how important St Stephen's is to my community. One of the few occasions I had ventured in was for the recording of BBC's Any Questions and I thought the rows of pews conveyed an austere atmosphere. I was back shortly afterwards and the church was transformed physically and functionally. The space was alive with the cafe in the corner, the crafters and the chatter.

The atmosphere is always inclusive and St Stephen's is so much more than just a church. Walking in feels so welcoming and it really is the axis around which so much in my council ward and division rotates. I cannot speak highly enough about St Stephen's and its influence on those living nearby.

Mark Hood

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councillor and Kent County Councillor for Tonbridge

St Stephen's is a church at the heart of its community. Living Well is a fantastic community venture, welcoming young and old alike into a beautiful welcoming place. With outreach opportunities for homeless charities, the CAB, cancer support amongst others, the church is at the forefront of Feast community larders, which they host every week, and the Tonbridge repair cafe that meets there every month. A community crafting group is also hosted, offering real support since the end of Covid lockdowns. Quietly working behind the scenes the church also offers Christmas dinner, and numerous other inclusive and warm events. They are a complete blessing to the south of Tonbridge.

Lee Athwal, BEM

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councillor and Member of Tonbridge Lions Club



A PLACE FOR ALL

GROWING YOUNGER

YOUTH & CHILDREN

VISION

St Stephen's has a heart to see children, young people and their families come to know God and support them on their discipleship journey. Through our youth and children's programme we seek to help children and young people to:

- Know they are loved and valued by God
- Understand who God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are
- Know Jesus as their friend, Saviour, and Lord and declare their faith through baptism or confirmation
- Grow in their relationship with God through bible reading and prayer
- Experience God's presence through prayer and worship
- Enjoy friendship with and encourage each other
- Learn how to make godly choices in their lives and serve God in their homes, schools, local community, and the wider world

CURRENT MINISTRY

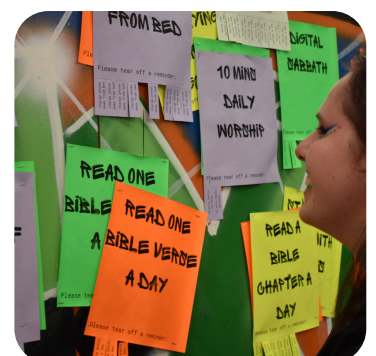
We have a well-established programme of Sunday and mid-week groups for children and young people run by a committed team of volunteer leaders led by, Rachael Hosier, our Youth and Children's Pastor.

Residential opportunities are a key part of our youth work. Our older young people have attended Satellites Youth Festival run by Youthscape for the last two summers and we are planning a Youth Weekend in April 2024. We also offer a range of social events aimed at having fun and building community amongst our young people.

As a family friendly church, we also provide opportunities for all-ages to worship and enjoy fellowship together. In recent years we have experimented with different models of intergenerational worship during the summer including Zones (based on different learning styles) and café-style services. We also have a Parenting for Faith library and highlight events and resources that help families to grow faith in their everyday lives.

Educational provision within our Parish is unique within the area, if not nationally, with three primary schools, five secondary schools, six preschools/nurseries, a special school and a FE college. The thousands of children and young people who attend these establishments affords significant opportunities for sharing the Christian faith. We already have strong relationships with Bishop Chavasse Primary School, a Church of England School which St Stephen's was involved in establishing in 2017, Sussex Road Primary School, the nearest school to the church, and Royal Rise Primary. We support the schools in a number of ways including leading Collective Worship, an after school Explore the Bible Club, regular church services and Governorship.

St Stephen's has a long history of investing in ministry with children, young people and their families, previously having a staff team including a Youth Pastor, Children's Pastor and internships to grow leaders of the future. In recent years the church has experienced some of the decline in numbers of young people and their families seen in the church nationally, however the church remains committed to being a community of all ages who are seeking to know God and make God known.



FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

We have recently been invited by the Diocese to be part of a strategic bid to the Church Commissioners. The project is seeking to grow Youth and Children's ministry across the Diocese by establishing five Centres of Excellence. Each of these will have a focus on ministry with a specific age group and form a network to resource other churches. The project will be fully funded for at least five years and has three main areas:

- Centres of Excellence with full-time workers
- Degree Apprenticeship Scheme
- Learning Pathways for volunteer and employed youth and children's leaders

St Stephen's is being included in the bid to become a Centre of Excellence for secondary age young people with funding for a full-time experienced worker from April 2025. The bid also includes funding for two-degree level apprenticeships at St Stephen's to be recruited from 2026/27 (timing subject to government plans for degree apprenticeships)

Becoming a Centre of Excellence will enable St Stephen's to rebuild the Youth and Children's team so that we have the capacity to develop our ministry particularly with young families and those young people who attend school in our Parish. Key areas for growth include:

- building relationships and opportunities to explore faith with young families especially
- those who attend STEPS and our Play Space
- welcoming young people from local secondary schools and helping them to explore faith through church and school-based activities
- supporting families with children who have additional needs to explore and grow their faith



18 - 30'S

Over the last few years, we have focussed our evening service, "Plugged In", at this age range, though it is open to all, but following the pandemic and a struggle to find volunteers, reduced its frequency to once a month. It is our hope and aim to grow this service both numerically and to become more regular, especially with us recognising from our discipleship survey that over the last 10 years our numbers in this age bracket have substantially reduced.

This has encouraged us to focus a key part of our strategy on "growing younger", and to develop the job description for a new Associate Vicar around helping us to fulfil this, through working with others in this age bracket or who have a longing to see this area of church life grow, through relevant and accessible worship, through small groups and social activities, through the use of social media.

We are therefore looking for an Associate Vicar with a vision and heart to help us develop a strategy and grow this area of church life.





St Stephen's has had a pre-school associated with it for over 40 years and many church children used to attend. Originally there was a strong Christian ethos and definite connection with the church, however over the past 10 years or so we have struggled to maintain this ethos and connection or to recruit staff with a Christian faith.

During the past couple of years as we have considered our strategy there have been questions raised about whether it is right to continue to operate a pre-school which is not actively supporting the mission of the church and whether it is absorbing time and resources that might be better focused elsewhere. Given our aim to encourage more families and young people though, there is also a strong argument in favour of rebuilding the Christian ethos and links with the church so that the pre-school once again acts as an effective ministry of St Stephen's.

Work has already begun towards this goal and this is a key area in which we hope our new Associate Vicar will get actively involved, through oversight of the Pre-School Manager and relationship building with parents and carers, and also through growing our Youth & Children's team supported by the Strategic Bid.

STEPS is Ofsted registered and has achieved a Good rating in its last 3 Ofsted assessments. It is popular and well regarded within the local area and we are proud of the achievements of its staff in providing such a high level of pre-school care. We are hoping that we can build on its many positive features so that it also supports our aim and desire to bring the good news of Jesus to families in our parish.

My three children went to the pre-school, then as they had children they went too. A great local friendly group of staff and great use of the garden.

My son felt included, what a wonderful set of teachers - my son's favourite teachers! Huge indoors and outdoors with a lot of playing materials - special thanks for looking after the children like their own.

Thank you STEPS Pre-School for all that you've done, for taking care of me and making learning so fun!

Feedback from STEPS Families



SAFEGUARDING

These are the key ministries that happen in the life of St. Stephen's, although there is much more that goes on throughout the year, but to support all these, we regard safeguarding as a key priority. It is an integral part of our life and ministry and we actively work to ensure our culture promotes safe environments for all children, young people and vulnerable adults, and to support any victims of abuse.

We currently have around 140 volunteers involved in roles involving interaction with youth and children and vulnerable adults, all of whom are appropriately recruited and are required to complete safeguarding training every three years.

All leaders are encouraged to bring to attention any concerns and we are lucky to have a strong safeguarding team, including our Parish Safeguarding Officer supported by advocates for Children and Young People and for Vulnerable Adults, who can take forward issues that require further attention.

We follow the Diocesan safeguarding policies and our PCC monitors compliance, reviewing the Action plan from the Church of England's Safeguarding dashboard at each PCC meeting. Meanwhile our Lead Recruiter is kept busy keeping on top of ensuring almost 90 DBS checks are regularly renewed and new volunteers are recruited in line with our policies.

A key focus for us is to create a safe and healthy culture for all.



OUR WIDER MISSION

St Stephen's has a long tradition of tithing our donated income to support a range of mission partnerships throughout the UK and the world. This area of church life is co-ordinated by our Mission Action Group (MAG).

Whilst we send money to disaster relief appeals and may help support members of the congregation on short term mission projects, our focus is on supporting and building deeper relationships with a small number of mission partners.

IN TONBRIDGE

As well as our community hub, Living Well, we have strong links with Tonbridge Area Churches Together (TACT) and support a local charity, High Hopes, which actively shares the good news of the gospel with children in the Tonbridge area. (For more information [click here](#))

IN EUROPE

Among those we support further afield is the Charis Foundation in Romania. Charis is a Christian mission that aims to change the community by showing God's love in practical ways. We have been supporting Charis since 2002, with members of the congregation visiting on a number of occasions and Dani and Mona Cuipe, its founders, visiting us in Tonbridge several times over the years. We plan to take a group out to Charis during 2025, providing an opportunity to experience mission in action at the same time as providing practical support. (For more information [click here](#))

IN AFRICA

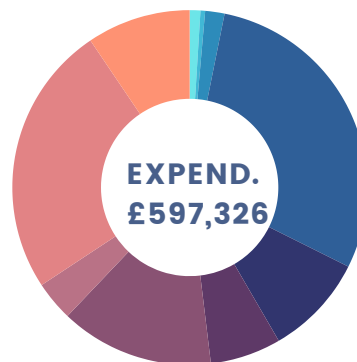
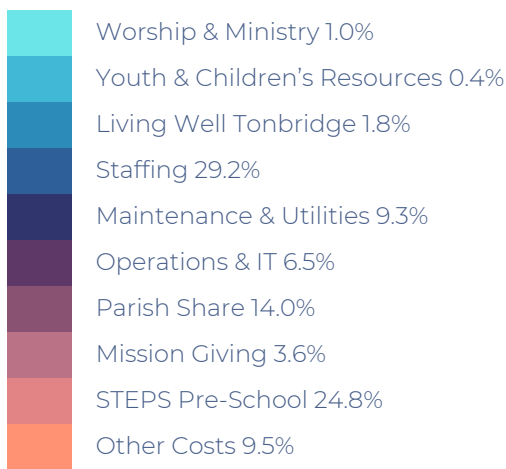
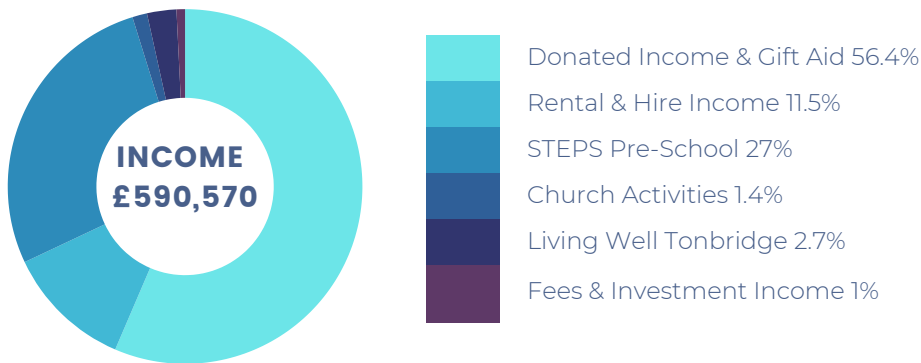
We are supporting a church and community empowerment process in 10 villages close to Matongoro to the north of Mpwapwa Diocese, in the central highlands of Tanzania. Given the impact of climate change and erratic rains, we have recently added training on, and opportunities to adopt, new water management methods. This is being overseen by St Philip's Theological College in Kongwa with the support of Mpwapwa Diocese. (For more information [click here](#))



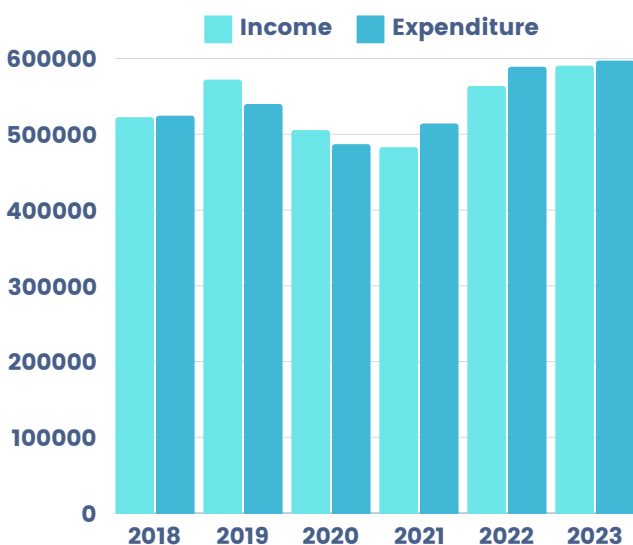
OUR FINANCES

With an annual turnover in 2023 of almost £600,000 (including our pre-school) we have been extremely blessed over the years by a generous congregation and a PCC who carefully oversee our finances. Over 50% of our income comes from donated income and much of this is given regularly by standing order. The past two or three years though have seen a significant increase in costs and a shift towards one-off giving which has made planning for our future growth more difficult. When staff have left we have not always felt able to replace them reducing our staff team.

One of the suggestions in the UCAN review that took place early in 2023 was that we sell some of the properties at St Eanwythe's and use the funds to increase staffing, carry out capital projects and invest the rest to cover the lost rental income. Our PCC have agreed to this in principle and our plan is to start marketing at least some of the property in 2025. This will need to be carefully managed as we could have significant periods without income but once this process is complete, we hope the funds will allow us to invest for the future growth of St Stephens.



INCOME & EXPENDITURE



PLANNED GIVING



SCHOOLS, PRE-SCHOOLS & NURSERIES WITHIN OUR PARISH

PRIMARY

Bishop Chavasse (Church of England)

OFSTED: Outstanding (2022) SIAMS: Good (2019)

Sussex Road

OFSTED: Good (2021)

Royal Rise

OFSTED: Good (2021)

SECONDARY

Kent has retained a dual system of Grammar and Non-Selective schools, and the parish includes both. In addition, Bennett Memorial Church of England Secondary School (mixed) is in Tunbridge Wells, and quite a few of the church young people attend this school.

The Judd School (Grammar, boys with girls in Y12 & 13)

OFSTED: Outstanding (2015)

Leigh Academy (Non-Selective, recently become co-educational)

OFSTED: Good (2023)

Tonbridge Grammar School (Grammar, girls with boys in Y12 & 13)

OFSTED: Outstanding (2019)

Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls (Grammar, girls with boys in Y12 & 13)

OFSTED: Good (2024)

Hillview (Non-Selective, girls)

OFSTED: Good (2023)

PRE-SCHOOLS & NURSERIES

STEPS

OFSTED: Good (2022)

Oaklands Day Nursery

OFSTED: Good (2021)

Juniors Day Nursery

OFSTED: Good (2022)

Bright Horizons

OFSTED: Good (2023)

Happy Faces Pre-School

OFSTED: Good (2024)

Littleview Day Nursery

OFSTED: Good (2023)

OTHER PROVISION WITHIN THE PARISH

Nexus Foundation Special School

OFSTED: Good (2023)

North Kent College

OFSTED: Good (2024)