St Mary’s Upton (Overchurch) Parish Information Document

St Mary’s Upton Parish
St Mary’s Church and The Centre
Children and Families worker

St Mary’s Church and the Centre seeks to be:
Making a difference wherever we are as we share faith for life in Christ by:
celebrating our faith in Jesus through our ‘worship‘ in the widest sense;
by welcoming people and helping them to belong to our church family;
by becoming a healing community where people find a place where they are helped in their pain and struggles;
by equipping disciples ‘to make a difference wherever they are’;
and by delighting in sharing our faith in relevant ways.

Background
St Mary’s is a large evangelical Parish Church with an excellent track record in working with children and young people. The intention of this post to build upon the current good foundation of ministry and mission to children and to further develop our work with children and families.

The website www.stm-upton.org.uk contains much information about the life and various ministries of the church. There is also a link to Re:View, the church magazine which gives a good description of church life.

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1. An overview of the parish

Upton is a suburban “village” towards the western end of the Wirral peninsula. The name, Upton, is the Anglo Saxon word for ‘homestead on the hill’, the ‘homestead’ having been situated near the site of Iron Age settlers.

1.1 Historical background

A Norman Church was built at Overchurch (the western end of the parish) in the fourteenth century but there was no resident priest for another 300 years. The ‘homestead’ developed into a village during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the increasing importance of Liverpool as a city and a port led to a reduction in market trade as Upton was not on the early ‘turnpike’ road. The present St Mary’s Church, built in local sandstone, was dedicated in 1868. By then Upton was becoming attractive to wealthy families from Liverpool or the new port of Birkenhead, who wanted to keep away from the noise, filth and disease of Liverpool.

1.2 Developments in Upton village

During the eleventh century there were twelve families living in Upton. By the end of the nineteenth century there were about 800 people rising to 12,500 by 2003. The present population represents a range of social classes living in a variety of housing (from council estates to expensive detached homes). The 1930s saw Upton developing as a suburb, with a new road tunnel enabling business and trades people to reach Liverpool easily, but post war developments brought new roads and rapid residential expansion. By the 1960s the local shops had become supermarkets or national network enterprises.

Since the 1970s there have been two main residential foci (Saughall Massie and Upton) which are separated by a spur of the M53 Motorway (Exit 2) which leads into the Upton by-pass.

1.3 The Community of Upton

The people of Upton are predominantly white, British, but with a few professionals from other ethnic backgrounds. There are more older people in the area than in the country as a whole (24.5% over 60 years compared to a national average of 20.9%). The marital status of people shows that Upton has more widowed persons than in most parts of Britain (11.5% compared to 8.4%). The majority of people (82%) claim to be Christian - considerably more than the national average (71.8%). Unemployment in the area (4.3%) is more than in the country as a whole (3.4%). (2004 figures)
1.4 Public Facilities and resources in Upton

While Upton itself is not endowed with many public facilities and resources, the community has easy access to those in neighbouring villages and towns.

Health
There are two General Practice Units in the parish and one dentist. Nursing homes and sheltered accommodation provide beds in the community. The district hospital at Arrowe Park is half a mile outside the parish boundary.

Education
Two infant and junior schools (one Roman Catholic) are situated in the parish. St Mary’s Church has excellent links with Overchurch Infant and Junior School. There is one (Roman Catholic) private Secondary School and there is a wide choice of state and private education throughout Wirral. Hayfield School for children with special needs is in the parish.

The village has less people with a university background (14.4%) than the national average (19.8%) and there are no institutes of higher education in Upton.

Social activities
Upton lacks cinemas, theatres and concert halls, but some small music groups and amateur dramatic groups meet in the village. There are five pubs in Upton and Saughall Massie as well as restaurants and ‘take-away’ food outlets. Upton has a cricket club with a long history. The Victory Hall, with sports facilities, has been a focus of the village throughout the past century. More recently two new fitness centres have opened in the village. There is a good public library in the parish with reading groups. Children’s and youth activities include brownies, cubs, guides and scouts, some of which are associated with the church.

Resource centres
A job centre is situated in the parish.

Police
The Upton ward (which extends beyond the parish) is covered by Merseyside police based at Upton Police Station, which has a Community Police team who collaborate readily with the Church in advising and supporting local initiatives.

Political parties
Margaret Greenwood (Labour) is our present MP.

Religious centres
There are two Churches in the village (Church of England and Roman Catholic). Local Clergy occasionally meet together.
2 St Mary's Church

St Mary’s Church is in the Deanery of Wirral North, and the Diocese of Chester. It has an evangelical tradition, the Simeon Trusts having accepted patronage of the church in 1909.

2.1 Development of the Church

The present church was built in 1868, and grew during the 1960s and 1970s to be a church of 500-600 people. A church hall, which had been on the agenda since 1937, was eventually built and opened in 1959. “St Mary’s Centre”, a former shop, a mile to the west of the Church in Saughall Massie, was opened in the mid 1970s. The next door shop was purchased in 1984 and the two joined. Holmleigh is a large house next to the church halls, used for offices and small group activities. A redundant Bank opposite the church was purchased in 1997 and has since been a focal point for youth activities. The youth department also run a clothes shop in the village called ‘Unique’.

2.2 The Mission Statement of the Church

The vision of our church is to ‘make a difference wherever we are as we share faith for life in Christ’ in the following five ways...

- by celebrating our faith in Jesus through our ‘worship’ in the widest sense;
- by welcoming people and helping them to belong to our church family;
- by becoming a healing community in which people find a place where they are helped in their pain and struggles;
- by equipping disciples ‘to make a difference wherever they are’;
- and by delighting in sharing our faith in relevant ways.

2.3 Parochial Church Council (PCC)

The present PCC, which meets bi-monthly, oversees most of the business of the church and its policy. The Church Wardens have a high profile role with involvement in many areas of church life. Each main congregation also has its own Deputy Warden. Presently there are over twenty PCC members.

2.4 The Church Family

Staff
Our staff team is made up of: the Vicar, Associate Vicar, four lay readers, three admin workers in the office, a pastoral care coordinator, three paid members of our youth team, a caretaker, together with volunteers in the office, licensed pastoral workers, a large team of volunteers supporting ministry and mission across all areas of church life.
The congregation
At the end of the First World War, there were 188 names on the electoral roll, but fifteen years later the roll had increased considerably. New and refreshing approaches to worship and ministry in the 1960s brought more people into the church. The electoral roll now stands around 450 with about half coming from outside the parish.

2.5 Finance

Total income at present is approximately £370,000. Giving to world mission is about 10% of income.

2.6 Regular Worship

Regular worship services include:

Sundays
09.00 am A traditional service of Morning Prayer or Holy Communion
10.30 am A less formal service for all ages at St Mary’s Centre
11.00 am An informal service for all ages at St Mary’s Church, including groups for all children (0-14 years). A Family Service and a Holy Communion service are held once a month, and Baptism and Thanksgivings for the birth of children are also held monthly. Sensory Sunday takes place every month for children with Special needs.
4.00pm Messy Church runs ‘termly’ at present
6.30 pm An informal contemporary service with extended opportunities for praise and learning.

Wednesdays
11.00 am Holy Communion in Holmleigh

Around 100 to 150 people attend each of the main Sunday services. The Centre congregation is usually 60 to 80 people. Average attendances at the parish church over the past five years can be seen in the diagram below.

2.7 Recent events in the Church

We started a CAP Christians Against Poverty North Wirral group recently with ourselves as the lead church. We are presently embarking on a major building project.

2.8 Mission and outreach

World Church
The Church is presently linked with several home grown mission partners worldwide and mission societies. In addition, ‘True Freedom Trust’ and ‘A Rocha’ both have their roots in St Mary’s. Twice a year there is a World Church Sunday which focuses on one specific group or situation, not necessarily from the four officially supported agencies.

Baptisms
Preparation for Baptism is an important means of outreach. Most Baptisms take place on Sundays at the 11.00am service using an informal approach which is appreciated by those who have little experience of church. Mature Christians ‘sponsor’ the parents of a child and bring them to a challenging preparation course.

Children’s Work
As well as Sunday morning children’s groups, there is a playgroup in the hall four mornings a week. In addition there are two different toddler groups each week to which sometimes over 100 carers and come for coffee and a chat. Through this group some parents have asked for Baptism for their children. We are regularly running Messy Church and look to include families in activities where there is little other contact with the church. ‘Lunch Bunch’ and the ‘BIF Bible is Fun’ club at Overchurch primary school activities provide further links. There are outreach and contact events throughout the year.

Youth Work
Contact and friendship is developed with several hundred local young people in the parish. Daily activities are based in “The Bank”. Through this ministry many young people have come to faith recently. As well as informal discussions and Bible studies there are also club activities such as rock climbing, sports, summer camps and holidays. For those who prefer indoor activities there is drama, dance, music and pantomime. The Bank is open regularly on weekday afternoons and on Saturdays. We provide a strong link with the local secondary school Woodchurch Academy Church of England School through our school chaplaincy with a part time chaplain on site.

2.9 St Mary’s Church Activities

St Mary’s and The Centre are big on ‘small groups’ - about 40% of the congregation are linked to these groups. The aim is that small groups should provide a central heartbeat to the life of the congregations and become the primary place where every member of St Mary’s can find a sense of belonging and from where pastoral support can be offered. The groups are the ‘other half’ on the Sunday Learning series and are the support of each individuals everyday life.

Alpha and ‘Start’ courses
We run an Alpha Course each year and a Start course as and when needed and Christian enquirer evenings and interview evenings introducing those with a story to tell of change and making a difference in the name of Christ.
Ministry amongst older people
There is a large number of older people in church and in the community. At present, weekly activities include the Elder Branch, a Wednesday service of Holy Communion followed by soup and sandwiches; small study groups; and regular visits are made to nursing and residential homes.

Communications
Noticesheets, Re:View Magazine, Faith for Life magazine, website and Facebook.

Pastoral support
A structure of lay pastors and pastoral elders, together with small-group leaders provides pastoral support for each member of the congregation. Home and hospital visits, Holy Communion services in nursing homes and for the housebound, and contacts with clergy and staff extends the support system. Pastoral concern for those who are not church members is expressed through Baptism and Marriage preparation, as well as through contact with the bereaved in the community, some of whom find the Wednesday Holy Communion service helpful.