St Mary the Virgin South Benfleet Parish Profile 2021
Job description

What we need - how you can help us

St Mary’s
At a Glance
Covering Essex and East London, Chelmsford is one of the largest, most diverse and exciting dioceses in the Church of England. We are home to more than 3 million people representing almost all socioeconomic, ethnic and faith groups and a fantastic variety of cultures and traditions.

Our mission is to be a transforming presence in every community, open and welcoming to everyone and living out God’s love for all people.

In the short time since I have been Diocesan Bishop, from March 2021, I have witnessed people’s great warmth and heard stories about the wonderful things going on in our parishes. We are looking for priests who are excited about our mission and excited about leading church communities; communities that are demonstrating the love of Christ in word and action, looking outwards to the needs of the world and sharing the good news of the gospel.

Of course, like many dioceses in the Church of England we face significant challenges. The decrease in national subsidy that helps us to pay clergy stipends has left us with a significant annual deficit that we must deal with. At the same time, we have a large number of vacant clergy posts that we have struggled to fill. Across the Church of England, church attendance has been in decline as has financial giving. In Essex and East London we also have some of the largest areas of population growth in the country where our challenge is to establish new and vibrant Christian communities. And of course, we do not yet fully understand the long-term impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

For these reasons and others, I sense the whole Church of God is at this current time in a liminal season when we cannot clearly see the future and we don’t quite know what it will look like. It is in this context that I am starting my ministry as Bishop of Chelmsford. My plan is to listen, learn and discern with others what the best way forward is for our Church. To ensure that we build on the great work that is taking place in many of our churches and worshipping communities and to enable us to change and adapt where we need to. I do so in the knowledge that the Church has faced profound challenges in the past and I do so with faith that when we open ourselves up to being changed and transformed, we are best placed to serve God and God’s people.

Any new priest joining us in the Diocese of Chelmsford does so at a time of challenge, a time of change and most significantly a time of hope for our Church in this most diverse and exciting of dioceses.

+Buli
Bishop of Chelmsford
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+Guli

Bishop of Chelmsford
Introduction

Welcome to the Parish of St Mary the Virgin, South Benfleet.

The site of this beautiful Grade One listed building has been a place of worship since the Anglo Saxons went into Battle with the Vikings in 893AD. The Church was originally a small wooden structure and during the most recent renovation the original corner flat stones were discovered under the floor.

The main structure we now see dates from the 12th Century and has undergone many alterations and refurbishments in subsequent years.

St Mary’s is a Church……..

Steeped in tradition, and has been connected with Westminster Abbey since Benedictine monks were first given care of the Church and Parish several centuries ago. This is, even to this day, still a long standing connection we have with our much loved Patrons.

The Catholic Tradition at St Marys…..

Is absolutely integral to our prayer life and Worship for our congregation, rooted in catholic faith and expressed in Anglican traditions is both a treasure and a gift.

Our Church is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary……

We honour her feast days as best we can with devotion and dignity and we also hold many values of ‘The Society of Mary’ within our Tradition.

St Marys.......Plays a significant role in the lives of many people in the parish, and has done for around a thousand years

There continues to be a real connection with our ancient and much loved Church for Weddings, Baptisms and funerals.

We Have an average Congregation of around 30 people in recent times, and up to 50 on important feast days. An Average of up to 5 weddings a year and approximately 10 Baptisms a year.
Our New Parish Priest

Our Longing is for a new priest and pastor from within the Catholic tradition of the Church of England,

Preferably affiliated to the society of Saint Wilfred and Hilda, and the Society of Mary.

We would like our new priest to nurture the people, in the tradition and prayer life of our Society Band B Parish Church.

We hope to find a Priest to be with us on a ‘House for Duty’ contract.

To lead us in dignified worship on Sundays, High Days and Holy Days.

To give us fresh insights in the faith received and a deeper understanding of Scripture.

As a congregation, to help us connect creatively with those who come to us for Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals.

To develop our pastoral ministry and outreach to the local community.

To build upon the relationship the Church has with local Schools.

Someone who enjoys social activities and willing to enter fully into the life of the Parish.

To encourage and support our Readers and Lay Ministers.

Prayerfully encourage and develop our ministry of healing and devotion to our Lady of Walsingham.
Aspirations and Opportunities

We hope our new priest will recognise ‘Worship’ as a priority at St Marys, Building on our tradition, while helping us to find new ways to connect with people in the local community and bring them to faith.

We are offering a stunning 4 Bedroom house in a beautiful location on Vicarage hill. It has all the charm of the country, with local amenities close by.

In this house for duty appointment

We believe that South Benfleet can offer a priest, a really good life balance in an excellent and beautiful location.
Quality of local life within the Parish

Our beautiful Church is located within the South Benfleet Conservation Area in the Borough of Castle Point. Situated nearby, the main line railway station provides quick and easy access to Central London by the C2C rail link. The A13, A127 and A130 roads are all conveniently within reach, providing routes to London, Southend and Chelmsford.

There are vibrant local restaurants, public houses, excellent countryside walks and the Thames Estuary with a yacht and sailing club within walking distance. Additionally, excellent golf facilities are close to the Vicarage and a swimming pool and Leisure Centre only a five minute drive away.

The parish of St Mary the Virgin, South Benfleet lies in the Deanery of Hadleigh, within the Archdeaconry of Southend, and the Diocese of Chelmsford. Our Church has informal links to other Society churches in the area, with the possibility of more foundation links planned in the future which add to St Mary’s quality of Church life.

This charming suburban town is quaint and friendly. Depending on the new priest’s needs, there is a variety of primary and secondary schools including a Sixth Form college in the local area.

South Benfleet also has a generous number of doctors and dentists within the Parish as well as a NHS clinic. Southend and Basildon hospitals are easily reached by car or bus and are well-regarded. There is a public library in the main shopping centre as well as a hall which provides a venue for a number of community groups and activities.

South Benfleet is a commuter town where many people travel to their work and are well served by excellent public transport, there is still a strong sense of community here.

South Benfleet is a very pleasant place to live, with an excellent balance of rural and modern accessible amenities.
The path way to the vicarage

The old Water tower
The neighbouring Methodist Church

The War Memorial
A Map of Benfleet and the surrounding area
St Marys Church Finance
An Overview

Recent years have seen a major renovation of the Church at a cost of £265,000. We installed gas heating, insulated the roof, rewired the whole building, installed lighting, and removed most of the pews which were replaced with chairs, installed a kitchen area and redecorated throughout. While we received a significant part of the funding from grant-making trusts, 48% was contributed by St Mary’s, through its trust funds, donations and fund raising.

This was followed by an urgent need to replace the lead roof over the South Aisle at a cost of £36000, of which £12000 was contributed by St Mary’s.

It has allowed us to open the church to the wider community and has enabled us to hold fund raising events in a warm and welcoming environment.

Our income comes from four main sources: the Church hall, wedding contributions, donations and fund-raising events. A good portion of our funding is generated by way of collections; we have recently made a regular appeal for our congregation to move toward stewardship and digital payments.

Income, by way of our planned collections, is made up of approximately 75% through standing order / 25% through the envelope scheme. It is fair to say that collection income has been under some pressure over recent years and particularly during times of lockdown.

Fund raising is also a significant part of our income and was a great contributor to our Parish Share of £25653 in full for 2019. At the beginning of this year we had planned a full programme of fund-raising events to meet our Parish Share of £26500 but in the current climate of Covid this has had to be shelved until we receive further guidance.

Our Church Hall is maintained to a high standard of interior decoration and a new floor has been laid in recent years. This has resulted in a substantially higher level of hire.

Our recent appearance on BBC TV’s “The Repair Shop” has stimulated Local interest among the community which will be advantageous in Future fund raising efforts.

We have a few small projects close to completion, such as the installation of a stair case in the tower to make maintaining the bells, Clock, and roof top safer and more accessible.

There has also been some funds raised to erect a new flag pole, but the pricing and details have yet to be completed.
St Mary’s Who’s Who and What We Do in the PPC and Church Team.

Church Wardens

Colin Gregory and Catherine Ranson,

Both have day jobs within the care sector. Colin is very knowledgeable in Liturgy and Service and also lends his talents to being a skilled Thurifer, He has recently been helping St Mays by taking up an online presence while we have been in interregnum, Colin also has the task of updating and sorting the Electoral Role for the Church, and does a sterling job in all these roles.

Catherine is a licenced as a Lay Minister at St Mary’s and has permission to officiate at funerals, she also has charge of ordering stock for the Church Services and she has been assisting with the online ministry for the congregation in the absence of a full time clergy member.

The Wardens will of course, fully support the new priest in all aspects of Church life, and look forward to working with the New Priest in Driving St Marys forward in faith, Mission and Ministry.

Licenced Lay Ministry at St Marys

Catherine Ranson and Marian Howe’s roles as Licenced Lay Ministers at St Mary’s have previously been supporting visiting Priests during this time of interregnum; they are available to offer support for services, writing intercessions, funerals, baptisms and rotas and will be on hand and pleased to continue any of these tasks in the future. We are here to help!

Marian Howe

Marian has permission to officiate at funerals and has care for the wellbeing of Baptism, Wedding and Confirmation Candidates. She has been helping all our candidates in the absence of a priest and would love to continue the important ministry in the future.

She has such a sacramental heart and devotes much to the care and well-being of the Church and its members. Her prayerful nature gives so much to the people at St Mary’s and she has long-standing friendships with so many members of the congregation and is always ready to help in an honest and organised way. Marian also has a passion for the healing Ministries and runs a regular evening Healing Prayer service once a month, which has proven to be very enriching for many members of our congregation.
Ben Miller

Ben is our Parish Secretary and Deputy Warden. He is in Charge of all correspondence for St Mary’s and has taken on the advertising for the Church, helping to produce and update many posters and leaflets to spread the word of all the new events and activities our beautiful Church has to offer our community. Ben’s former role in business has meant he has been a wonderful asset to the Church, he also assists with organising The Church Hall Bookings and all the maintenance that comes along with this duty.

Ben together with his Wife Eileen, make up an amazing couple, who work tirelessly behind the scenes enabling effectiveness and efficiency of Church matters and raising of much needed funds.

Barry Woolf

Barry is our extremely efficient Parish Treasurer, who works exceedingly hard to keep our Finances in order and to ensure that the best outcomes are reached for maintenance and refurbishment matters, along with managing all the daily finances in the running of the Church, he and his wife Sonia work quietly and dynamically in the background. Barry’s talents also include Bell ringing and he is a valuable part of our dedicated team.

Eileen Miller

Eileen is our Verger and dedicated Server, helping the smooth running of our regular services and setting up for weddings and funerals.

Eileen is also part of the team running the toddler group. Eileen is absolutely dedicated to fund-raising for our Church and is adaptable in her role as event organiser; she is capable and friendly and keeps our social calendar fully-stocked with events which are an integral part of the outreach to the community.
Maz Morgan

Is the safeguarding officer in charge of the DBS checks and training for the protection of vulnerable Adults and Children within a Church setting and ensuring the safety and well-being of the congregation when visited at home.

Maz also has a connection with the local schools and uses her skills as a former teacher to facilitate and nurture the children’s learning in high days and holy days, and is a part of the team helping to run the toddler group every week.

She is also part of the flower arranging team who ensure that St Marys looks beautiful on special celebrations for the benefit of the congregation and the visiting community.

Jonathan Morgan.

Jonathan is our Health and Safety Officer and has been a huge asset to St Marys in recent times, ensuring the Health and well-being of everyone who attends the Church. Jonathan has written in consultation with church personnel, an updated organised guidance and Risk assessment for Church functions, being mindful of current guidelines and legal requirements. His calm and organised approach and attention to detail have been integral to the Church’s ever changing needs.

Juliet Boatman

Juliet has many roles within the church, as a welfare officer, bereavement counsellor, and visitor for the elderly in care homes.

Juliet’s first role as the welfare officer at St Mary’s, is where she has concern for the well-being of the congregation. A confidential register, with permissions granted, is kept of all the members of the congregation so we can offer pastoral care to anyone with troubles or those unable to attend church and cards, letters and calls can be made when appropriate.

The Church’s bereavement team offers its service as an outreach ministry to the wider community, helping them move forward, one day at a time with the Lord’s help. A one-to-one meeting is organised and there is a meeting on the 4th night of the month in the church hall with a telephone service that is available to anyone who needs the service.

There is an emphasis on offering practical advice with empathy and listening support based on the person’s needs, as each loss is individual, there is encouragement to speak to God we they offer spiritual guidance also.

Our Bereavement team tries to help anyone who is dealing with the death of a loved one but also takes into consideration grief or loss can have many factors to it, we offer this service from a Christian and spiritual standpoint, but we make our selves available to anyone experiencing grief whether they have a religious background or not.
The Work of the Church in the Community

We hope to shed light on the darkness that bereavement brings; our aim is to offer some hope for the future and show what a wonderful friend the church can be in times of uncertainty.

The congregation is the eyes and ears of community support, so we can help any of the members of our church with any needs, such as food shopping if needed, practical advice, and contact with friends and family, as well as support with any daily living needs.

We offer pastoral ministry to the residents of four of the local care homes and offers a service for the residents to engage in Prayer and singing once a week; this has been operating well since 2014.

The Priest and the care co-ordinator organise with managers of the homes dates for regular pastoral care for residents and the style of ministry is adapted to suit the needs of the people and help them with their prayer life. Services are around 30 minutes long, and we try to keep to a regular monthly visit. It is a vital role, assisting those living with complex disabilities and conditions in prayer, as many are unable to attend outside services. It is, indeed, a very worthwhile and rewarding part of the service the Church offers.

Eileen Miller and Lisa Chesneau

Our talented Events organisers, are responsible for a large amount of the fund-raising and community-sharing activities that happen at St Mary’s.

Together, they map out the years events and carry them through, to keep up the much loved fellowship our community enjoys.

Lisa has kindly kept up the smooth running of our Church Hall, often late at night, which is a fabulous connection with the community and she has been a guide leader in the local area for many years, as well as our resident quiz master at functions and parties. All round a fabulous member of the team.

Steve Moss

Steve assists with the running and maintenance of the Church Hall including cleaning and decorating, he is always ready to help with functions and social events he puts in a huge amount of effort to keep this venue in a good working and safe order and Steve also one of our dedicated Bell Ringers, helping us make high days, holy days and weddings special for our community.
The Hall

This function hall is a vital and thriving venue; it is the home of our toddler group as well as the craft group and St Mary’s Fellowship club, both run by Margaret Johnson. Most Church social evenings and events are held here. It is also hired by a number of local organisations, thus providing a centre for community events. Juliet organises the “Recycled Teenagers” exercise club every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month which provides a wonderful connection to Benfleet’s more senior residents.
David Roberts is the Bell Captain for St Mary’s and helps new candidates with their Bell ringing training plans. He also acts as our “odd job man” along with Ivan Smart and usually finds an effective solution to most problems. His helpful, friendly personality and kind, knowledgeable attitude have really helped in all areas of the Church life.

David Has been a wonderful source of help in all areas of planning, and maintaining the Bells and also helped greatly in maintaining and organising repair for the Clock on the tower, as well as many other forms of maintenance in our Church Building.
Social life of the Church

We usually have two events planned for every month.

Throughout the year we have parish “Curry nights and Sunday lunches”, fetes, quiz nights and jumble sales.

Held in the Church, we have musical evenings, including a “big band” playing 40’s music, ukulele band concert and local choir performance.

St Mary’s model railway club meet weekly and hold an exhibition every year in the Church hall. Our “craft and banner” group and “St Mary’s fellowship” group also meet weekly in the Church hall. Fortnightly, our “recycled teenagers” exercise group keeps parishioners fit.

Annually we hold our “10K Challenge” which is a walk or run around the perimeter of the Parish, and an afternoon BBQ. Both are always fun events and a big success.

In the summer we hold an open gardens tour, where we visit the gardens of our congregation, who volunteer to provide refreshments and entertainment, an all-round lovely community event.

In the Christmas season, our former Warden Terry, puts so much of his time and effort into holding a Mulled wine and carol event in his home, generating funds for the Church.

St Mary’s also have a number of skilled florists that have decorated our Church Beautifully all year round for many years, and there have been many Floral exhibitions held in Church that bring many people to our doors.

Our congregation make up our wonderful Church family and we are so grateful for their continual support throughout the years.

All of these varied events bring us as a congregation together socially and we are supported by people within our Parish who come to the events.

Charity

We have supported: the Yellow Door Project which operates as a food Bank and also has important outreach for the young community living locally.

The Shoe Box appeal, where we send gifts abroad to third world countries, and many donations have been made to Samaritans Purse; the Poppy appeal, a cause dear to our hearts; and world day of Prayer to name but a few.

One of our dearest members, Diana Hawkins, has worked tirelessly and supported UNICEF for many years and thus we offer our support

We are open to the idea of any charitable ventures a new priest would like to instigate and we can assure the full support of the congregation and PCC.
The Healing Ministry at St Mary’s

The Church’s Healing Ministry is a continuation of the Ministry of Jesus Christ. At St Mary’s we seek to fulfil it in the power of the same Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan. Jesus’ ministry was totally faithful and obedient to his Father. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of healing which Jesus proclaimed: ‘Go and preach the Gospel... Go and heal the sick’. This summarises the compassion Christ gave to His church. So Christians and we at St Mary’s have always been called to have special concern for those who are sick in Body Mind and Spirit. The Church’s ministry can be described as one of healing: the healing of ourselves and of our relationship with God, with one another and with our environment.

At St Mary’s we need our new priest to help us offer:

Public and private prayers of intercession; laying-on of hands with anointing, including reconciliation and absolution; building friendships with those in the parish who are in need of the healing love of God; listening to the needs of our congregation, offering them a way to God’s forgiveness.

We hope to reach our community through this ministry, to help those who may be experiencing prolonged illness or disability. It is our hope we can aid the people’s recovery and help anyone who may be experiencing a fear of their own mortality by helping them to see that fear can be driven out by God’s love.

At St Mary’s we believe that the healing ministry is for everyone; we all need healing in some way which is why we offer this service and because we firmly believe that Jesus Christ can meet us all in our point of need.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has meant we have needed to find new ways of reaching the people in the Parish; many are vulnerable or isolating and cannot leave their homes.

We have, therefore, encouraged our congregation to engage in Facebook where we have a variety of posts and videos ranging from a full mass celebrated by visiting priests, to prayers of intercession. Our “E-Blast” on a group email enables us to maintain contact and share in the readings for the coming month.

Our congregation has kept in touch with each other and a great community spirit has kept us all going in times of difficulty.

It is our hope to continue an online presence with the new priest, to offer ministry and mission in this new medium.

The possibilities are endless. With a little help and guidance, we hope for online Zoom groups to encompass various religious and social ventures. We must embrace the new technology so we can evangelise effectively and be the tools for God’s ministry.

Marian and Catherine have filled in, on occasion, with Morning Prayer and a Liturgy of the Word; we have had good feedback from the congregation which is encouraging. Despite the limitations and restrictions imposed on us, our church community is still being reached.
Renovation and Restoration

St Marys underwent a large renovation and restoration a few years ago and our congregation and our community couldn’t be more pleased with the beautiful results.

We are one of the resolution Parishes in the area, which has a variety of mutual support, we have a good relationship with other Churches of a similar tradition, Such as St James the Great, Leigh on Sea, St Margaret’s, Leigh on Sea, and St David’s, Eastwood.
Hadleigh Deanery

Acting Assistant Area Dean of Hadleigh Deanery, Revd Ruth Cartwright, and Lay Chair of Deanery Synod, Canon Ron McLernon write:

The Hadleigh Deanery is the most Southerly Deanery in the Diocese of Chelmsford and consists of 15 churches in 12 parishes with a variety of ages and types of buildings. Church tradition in terms of ecclesiology and theology is varied too, with four of our parishes, including St Mary’s, being under the pastoral care of the Bishop of Richborough. This is a source of richness, but can sometimes make working together a little challenging!

St Mary’s has a great deal of potential for growth, having one of the largest populations in the Deanery, and has the distinction of having featured recently on the BBC TV Programme, ‘The Repair Shop’ (the weather vane being the item restored).

The congregation have proved themselves enthusiastic in seeking to maintain and improve their building in order to welcome people in, and includes some very able folk, committed to developing outreach and service to the community and deeper fellowship and faith within the congregation.

A House for Duty priest is a new initiative for St Mary’s and presents a good opportunity for the congregation to have stability and support as they strive to achieve their objectives.

There are proposals for St Mary’s to cluster with St David’s, Eastwood, St Margaret’s and St James the Great, Leigh on Sea, as a ‘Mission and Ministry Unit’ under the Diocesan initiative of ‘Reimagining Ministry’. In whatever direction this may be developed, it is clear that the way forward for parishes in the Church of England is to work more closely together, however that is branded.

Deanery Synod meets quarterly and Chapter every two months, with recent meetings having been by Zoom rather than in person. Both are reasonably well supported and give opportunities to share ideas and be in touch with developments in the wider Diocese and Church of England. The House for Duty priest for St Mary’s will be made very welcome and offered every assistance by Deanery colleagues.

May 2021
The Bishop of Richborough, Bishop Norman Banks and our Archdeacon the Venerable Mike Lodge have both been an unfailing source of help and support and will no doubt continue to support St Mary’s and its new incumbents.

The PCC, Wardens and all the St Mary’s team are committed to offering our new priest support, encouragement and space in his ministry among us.

To summarise what we are looking for in our new Priest

A priest who loves God and loves people, a dedicated Disciple of Christ.

A Person of strong faith, integrity and prayer, who also has wide arms and a generous heart.

We hope our new priest will enthuse our Church with Vision to enable its development.

We would like our new priest to be a good communicator, and develop and build supportive relationships, a clear thinker who is creative and innovative bringing us new ideas and insights, while honouring the Tradition of the Holy Church.

In Conclusion

We at St Mary’s would like to thank you for taking the time to read this Profile,

And we hope God May be calling you to be our new Priest and Pastor.

Church address

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