



St Mary's Church

Wimbledon

**Mission Action Plan 2014**

# The Setting of St Mary's Church

There has been a church on the hill in Wimbledon Village since the time of the Domesday Book and before. During the intervening centuries it has been repeatedly rebuilt and the community in which it stands has changed from a rural village to a wealthy commuter suburb of London, whilst still maintaining a sense of a distinct community. As the Parish grew under the influence of the railway, a cluster of daughter churches were built. In the 1970s, four churches combined to become the Wimbledon Team. Of these churches, St Mary's remains the most visible sign of the presence of the Church of England. The Parish also includes the only Proprietary Chapel in Southwark Diocese.



*The Medieval Church*



*The Georgian Church*

The area of the Parish served by St Mary's has also changed considerably in recent years as house prices have risen often to astronomic levels. Many gardens have been sold for development; new houses now have basements, tiny gardens, and often electronic gates. The 2011 census data has been analysed to provide information about the area served by St Mary's.

Population of the Parish of Wimbledon	21,200
Population of area served by St Mary's	6,547

The age profile of St Mary's area is younger than might be expected



81% of the population is white  
58% say they are Christian

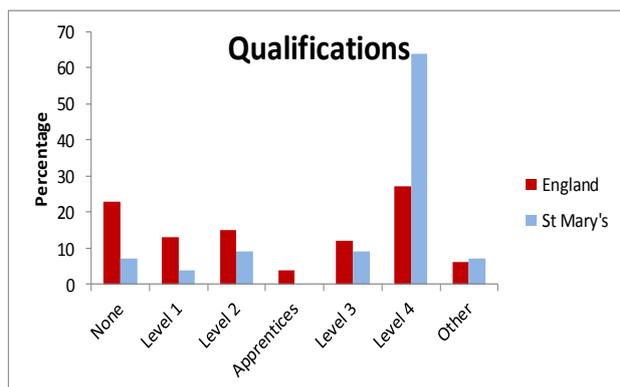
It is a wealthy area.

70% of people are property owners

25% of people are private renters

5% of people are social renters

The majority of people are educated to a high level. There is a disproportionate representation of 'the professions'.



2% of people in the area are unemployed and looking for work, although 26% of households have no adult in employment.

Health is good too.

17% of households having one or more person with a long-term health problem compared to a national average of 26%.

There are two church Primary schools in the Parish, one of which, Bishop Gilpin School, is in the St Mary's area. This school has achieved outstanding status in the last two OfStEd Reports, which makes the area desirable for families with young children. There are three private schools in the parish for primary aged children.

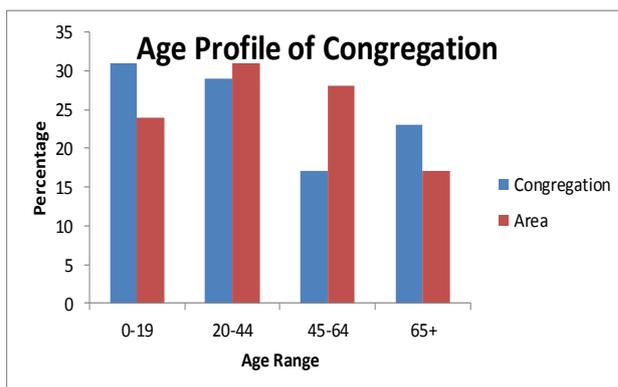
Accurate data is not available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that many children are given private tuition after school. Academic competition is fierce.

There is one state secondary school for girls in St Mary's area, and one Roman Catholic Secondary School and one private secondary school for girls in the remainder of the Parish. The state secondary school is a performing visual arts school with a wide catchment area, with few children attending who live in the immediate vicinity.

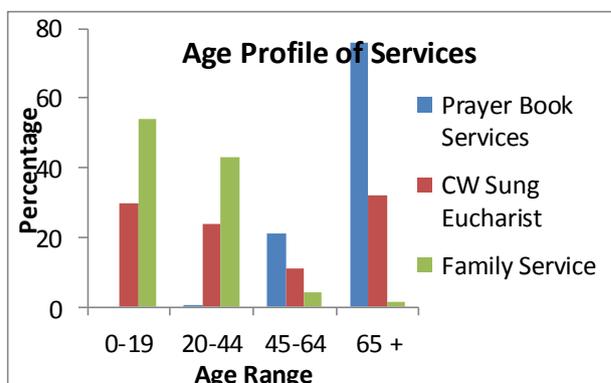
# The Congregation at St Mary's Church

Data was collected in 2014. At this time our electoral roll was 628, with an agreed membership number of 240.

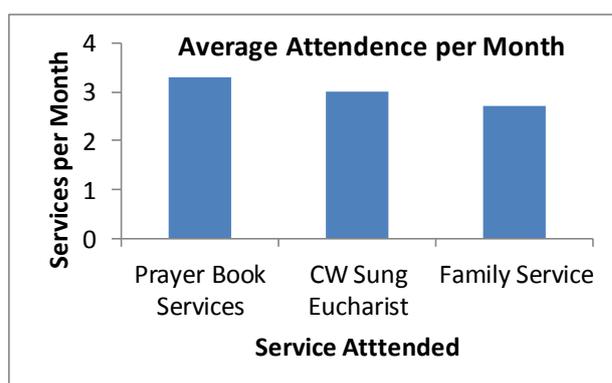
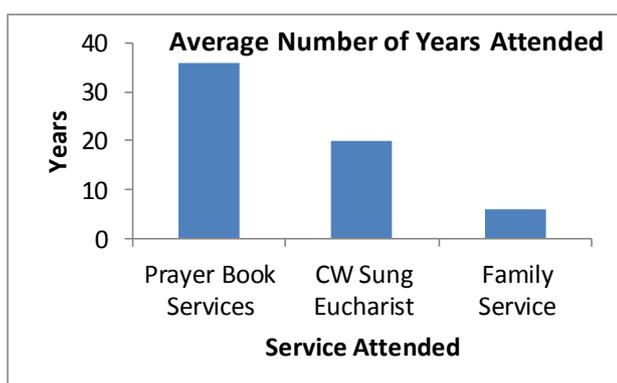
The large number of young families reflects the area, and is undoubtedly influenced by the demand for church school places. There is a notable disparity between church and area in the 45—64 age range. It is not clear whether there are fewer people than might be expected joining the church in this age group, or whether this represents the fact that 20—40 years ago there were fewer young families in church.



When the age profile of individual congregations at St Mary's is analysed, clear differences become apparent.



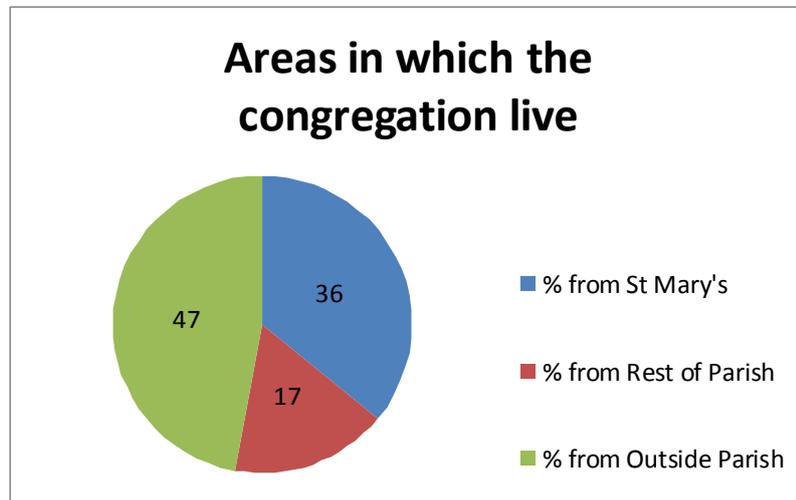
There are other significant differences between the congregations.



Those coming to the Family Service are newer to church and attend less frequently.

Although we have huge numbers of children, most are young. As they get older there is competition from sports activities on Sunday morning. Many families also move away to Surrey (or beyond) when children reach secondary school age. The houses are cheaper and there is a good selection of schools.

With such a range of C of E churches in the area, ranging in churchmanship from Conservative Evangelical to Anglo-Catholic, it is not surprising that people do not necessarily go to their nearest church.



64% of the congregation live outside the St Mary's area.

Although a significant proportion of the congregation have been coming to the church for decades, newer members of the congregation are more likely to come from outside the Parish, and many of these come through the Family Service and/or Toddler Praise.

## What attracts people to St Mary's?

St Mary's is at an advantage because it is an attractive building, it has easy Sunday morning parking, and the spire is visible from miles away. It is at a disadvantage because it is not in the commercial centre of the village and away from the public transport network.

Long-standing members of the congregation cite their reasons for staying as:

- Good liturgy
- Good music
- Choice between Common Worship and Book of Common Prayer
- Challenging preaching

New members come to the church initially because:

- They hear that we are child-friendly

- They come for occasional offices, particularly Baptism
- They are brought by friends to Toddler Praise
- They find us through our website

New members of the congregation stay because:

- They make friends
- They feel accepted
- They feel part of a living Christian Community

## Welcome and Belonging

In a recent survey

100% of the congregation felt welcomed

100% of the congregation felt they belonged

However encouraging this is, we recognise that many people come to have their child baptised and then do not stay, some come to get their child into the Church School and once that is achieved, they leave. In discussion with the congregation we examined what we do to see where improvements could be made.

Two key elements emerged:

- We need to know people's names
- We need to integrate people quickly.

There are newcomers' cards and newcomers are invited to social events, but not everyone fills in a card and often it is quite a while before the next newcomers drinks party at the Rectory. Sidesmen and welcomers need to be sensitive to the appearance of new people (which is difficult when there are many baptisms with guests from far afield). We have found that some new members are encouraged by being invited to read, lead intercessions, be a sidesman, make coffee or a range of other tasks. Many of the mid-week tasks can be performed with children in tow, eg church cleaning and churchyard maintenance, and this encourages contact between age groups. Belonging to a formal or informal grouping, such as attending Toddler Praise or being a part of the Choir helps people to belong and leads to friendships and support. These groups often provide their own social events. More such informal groupings might improve the sense of belonging.

## Feeling supported

In the survey

99% of the congregation felt supported by the ministry team

The reality is perhaps different. In discussion it was revealed that some do not feel that they are visited frequently enough, and that 'no-one knows when they are ill'.

Nevertheless, there are good provisions for some sections of the congregation:

### The Elderly

- Tuesday lunch
- Home Communion for the housebound
- Regular Communion services in nursing homes

### Young Parents

- Toddler Praise provides a forum for making friends
- Men Behaving Madly provides support for fathers and their children on a Saturday morning

### Carers

- Fountain Group Provides support for carers of relatives with dementia or other age-related problems.

### Teenagers

- Rafters provides a supportive group and our Family and Youth Worker provides pastoral support particularly during examination times.

Not everyone wants to belong to a group, and the problem of knowing who needs a visit or help is a continuing concern. A mechanism for sharing information is key to this. We have set up a pastoral team with the aim of minimising the risk of missing information. The Pastoral team have been trained in listening skills and ongoing training is planned.

We currently do not have any formal support for those who are divorced and we have no formal bereavement group. This may be something to consider for the future.

## Worship and Music

The variety of worship is appreciated:

8:00 am Holy Communion (BCP) *Av 25—35 communicants*

9:30 am Sung Eucharist (CW) *Av 150 communicants (Crèche & Sunday School)*

11:15 am Family Service ( Holy Communion of 1st Sunday of the month) *Av attendance 70 adults (+ children)*

6:30 pm Sung Evensong (full choral evensong once a month) *Av attendance 20*

The standard of music is high, with a robed choir (including choristers) at the Eucharist and Evensong. There is also a gospel choir which sings occasionally at the Family Service.

Children rarely attend at the BCP services. There is a Sunday School and a crèche at the 9:30 service, with over 70 children on the register. Children come into church for a blessing at Communion. At the 11:15 service children stay with their parents. It is noisy and somewhat chaotic, but (for example) children are involved in taking the collection and the relaxed atmosphere enables parents to feel that their children are welcomed. On occasion there have been over 100 children.

Intercessions are led by the laity at both the 9:30 and 11:15 services.

We should be more sensitive to those with poor hearing or eyesight. The loop system needs replacement and readers and intercessors need training to use the microphone well. At the moment the lighting is poor and this is not helped by failure to ensure that large print copies of services are always available.

Special services, particularly mid-week evening services, are poorly attended. In part this may be due to poor communication. However, we have a small but regular congregation for morning office, Monday to Friday.

Little of our worship is designed to be specially attractive to teenagers. We have a small base of this age group and recognise that teenagers prefer to go where there are many other teenagers. This is an area for further thought.

## Learning about the Faith

The preaching at St Mary's is appreciated. The tradition of the church is theologically liberal with a strong emphasis on biblical teaching. It is intellectually questioning, and so sermons stimulate reflection rather than provide tidy answers.

In a recent survey

25% of the congregation would appreciate study notes on the sermon

30% of the congregation wanted more study or discussion groups

This poses a challenge, as when we have held courses on the bible or prayer or other aspects of the Christian Journey they have not been oversubscribed. We often only get 3—5% of people attending, although our Lent Lectures are well attended. More research is needed to determine whether changing the time of day or the topic would alter this or whether it is either a failure in communication or simply that people, despite their best intentions, cannot spare the time.

Those who have attended courses on books of the bible or have come to confirmation classes have found them stimulating, but there is clearly a yearning to learn more. Those from the Family Service particularly commented on a need for help with learning to live as a Christian and learning to pray. We have had several quiet days and have started a Julian Group, but again these are not well attended. We need to work out why there is such a mismatch between stated desire and practice.

It has been suggested that we could provide more courses and lectures, and that we should start a Book Club.

It has been said that the best way of learning is to teach. A basic understanding of the bible has been fostered by parents leading the story time at Toddler Praise and those helping at Sunday School. The teaching at Sunday School is highly regarded, as is the provision for teenagers (even though few teenagers attend).

The Ministry Team is involved in leading assemblies at Bishop Gilpin School and this often links with what the children have learnt on Sundays. There is significant overlap between Sunday School and Bishop Gilpin.

## Care for the Wider Community

The expression of faith by our actions is important to the congregation. St Mary's is involved in

- The Merton Night Shelter. During the winter months, the hall is used to provide shelter for homeless and volunteers provide an evening meal and breakfast. We offer one night a week and other faith groups each offer a night. There are also regular collections of clothes for those attending the shelter or the Faith in Action Centre.
- The Food Bank. We have a monthly collection for the Wimbledon Food Bank, which volunteers deliver.
- Charitable Giving. 5% of our income is given to charities. Speakers from Charities are invited to preach and issues of social justice are frequently highlighted in sermons and teaching. We have particularly strong links with Christian Aid, Embrace the Middle East and the Church Urban Fund.
- Many individuals are involved with local charities such as the Wimbledon Guild and Faith in Action.
- We have an active Green Group. This ensures the churchyard is ecologically diverse

with provision of bat and bird boxes and wild flower areas and that the church uses energy responsibly and minimally. It encourages the congregation to walk or cycle rather than use the car, and vigorously promotes recycling. The church examined the possibility of have PEV panels on its halls, and reluctantly came to the conclusion that this was not appropriate.

## Evangelism

Much of our evangelism is low key, through work with the school, an open baptism policy, links with local community groups and special services. The service on Remembrance Day at the War Memorial in Wimbledon Village attracts over a thousand people and such Civic links and the opportunity to preach at School Carol Services and occasional offices provide an amazing opportunity to reach a wide range of people.

Those who are baptised are invited back to a baptism lunch and most families accept this invitation. Although many of these families do not come regularly to services, they maintain loose links with the church. The presence of a Church of England School provides an excellent opportunity for reaching out to people. Parents need to attend the church for at least a year, and if by the end of that time we have failed to convince them of the importance of Christ, that is our failure! The informal friendly family services makes it easy for people who are not used to church to join.

Innovations such as Bible Study in the Pub and 'Walk and Talk' (talking about a Book of the Bible while walking on the Common) have attracted existing members but not brought in new people.

## Communication

The website is a very important source of communication. We are fortunate to have an excellent webmaster who keeps it up to date. We have a weekly newssheet, a digital noticeboard and send out around 400 emails on a regular basis flagging up important events. We are setting up a Friends of St Mary's which will we hope will reach a wider audience. At Christmas and Easter we deliver cards to every house in the St Mary's area detailing the services and we put up giant posters outside the church. However, we still get people saying that they do not know what is happening. More research is needed to determine how this might be rectified.

Good communication seems to be at the heart of everything we do. Without it we cannot evangelise, our pastoral care will have gaping holes, we will be unable to maximise our planned giving income, some people will feel excluded and not welcomed, and we will be separate from rather than an integral part of the wider community. This may be an area where we could more fruitfully utilise the skills of members of the congregation.

## Staffing and Finance

Being a wealthy Parish means that our Parish Share is huge. Almost no-one gives 5% of their income to church, not least because they also support many other charities, so our planned giving does not even cover our Parish Share. We maintain a house for a Curate, and paid staff include a full-time Operations Manager, a Family Worker and a Director of Music. We also have a Reader, one retired NSM and one SPA. For the size of church, and if we are to continue to grow, we need more help within the ministry team. Many churches of comparable size have considerably larger staff. The Parish as whole pays for half a stipend for one of the team and owns and maintains three clergy houses.

We have two halls which bring in useful income, and we are hoping that the Friends of St Mary's will help financially once it gets going. One Hall is let to a Nursery and we urgently need more space in which to hold meetings and study groups. If we take back use of this hall our budget deficit (already standing at £40,000) will increase. Our finances cannot support the additional help we need, and the congregation work long hours and often do not have time for volunteering.

Some years ago, many in Wimbledon were taking early retirement with good pensions. Pensions are now lower and people are retiring later, which has a detrimental effect on the number of volunteers and on the amount received through planned giving.

If we are to continue to grow and to flourish, we have to find a way to reduce our expenditure and/or increase our income, whilst still maintaining our historic building.



## FIVE YEAR PLAN

	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Immediate Action</b>	<b>Within Five Years</b>
<b>Worship</b>	Seasonal booklets for use at 9:30 service. Little variation at 11:15	Introduce seasonal variations at 11:15.  Ensure there are large print versions for all services	Continual review of services. Have discrete screen and projector that will enable wider selection of songs and use of pictures to complement sermons and intercessions at 11:15 service
<b>Teaching about Scripture</b>	There is a regular Bible study group and there are short courses run on individual books of the bible.	Run a 'Beginners' Course. Have more Bible study Courses. Produce study notes on the sermon.	Identify more group leaders who can run study sessions and home groups. Start a Book Club
<b>Teaching about Life as a Christian and Spirituality</b>	There are confirmation Courses. We have not run a basic course on this recently, although there have been sessions on prayer and there is a Julian Group	Run a 'Beginners' Course  Produce study notes on the sermon.  Provide space for discussion about the sermon	Encourage people to talk about their faith.  Teach people how to communicate their faith  Have more prayer groups and teaching on prayer
<b>Pastoral Care</b>	We cater for the elderly well, but are less good with those having marital problems, postnatal depression or other issues.	Further training of the existing pastoral team and recruitment of new members. Set up post bereavement visiting by pastoral team.	Foster vocations.  Set up groups to help those living alone, and the bereaved.
<b>Evangelism</b>	We have opportunities through occasional offices, civic/ community links and the school	Use those opportunities to preach and teach	Train people to become confident in talking about their faith

*Continued...*

	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Immediate Action</b>	<b>Within Five Years</b>
<b>Creating Community</b>	<p>We have groups that cater for fathers, mothers, the elderly, and those with common interests, eg the choir.</p> <p>Small groups enable people to feel that they belong.</p>	<p>Encourage book groups and other interest groups. The challenge is where they can meet.</p> <p>Ensure we get newcomers' contact details.</p>	<p>Create comfortable small meeting room where small groups can meet.</p>
<b>Care for the Community and Environment</b>	<p>Merton Night Shelter. Regular collection for Food Bank.</p> <p>Committed to supporting Christian Charities</p> <p>Active Green Group</p>	<p>Increase links with local charities.</p>	<p>Have named reps for each charitable link</p> <p>Reduce carbon footprint</p>
<b>Children and Teenagers</b>	<p>We have good provision for children, but few older children and teenagers.</p>	<p>Explore possibility of starting a 'social action and justice' group for teenagers</p>	<p>Create better links with local secondary schools</p>
<b>Music</b>	<p>Robed choir and gospel choir. Ability to sing a wide range of music.</p>	<p>Identify more musicians to play at 11:15 service</p>	<p>Start a music band for 11:15 service</p>
<b>Fabric</b>	<p>Repairs completed on roof and spire. The church needs rewiring, new lighting, and an updated sound system</p>	<p>Rectify dangerous wiring and commission new lighting system</p>	<p>A flexible lighting and sound system that is in keeping with the building and enhances worship. Create better vestry space.</p>
<b>Communication</b>	<p>We use notice sheets, posters, digital poster, leaflet distribution and email.</p>	<p>Better use of electronic communication. Widen database</p>	<p>Increase the links with the community and local businesses. Use the skills of the congregation more creatively.</p>

## Summary

Our main growth area is with young families. We should maximise our work with that age group, aiming to increase their understanding of the faith and deepen their commitment.

Our strengths are the welcome and inclusivity, the excellence of worship and standard of preaching. We are good with young children. To maintain this sense of belonging we need to strengthen our pastoral care and increase the number of study groups. We need to provide for those with hearing or visual impairments.

We need to make stronger links with those churches that have good provision for teenagers, but also explore the possibility of creating a social action and justice group for teenagers

We need to encourage more vocations and more volunteers. We need to train more people in communicating their faith and in leadership roles.

We need to increase our income so that we can afford an additional full time priest. With the right person joining us and implementing our strategy for creating community we could increase our congregation by another 50%.

As we cannot do everything at once, we need to concentrate on those areas where we can make a real difference.