

The Benefice of Stevenage St Nicholas and Graveley



Parish Profile Autumn 2022



Contents

Introduction from the Church Wardens	2	What we do	13	Where we are going	18
Person Specification.....	3	Services.....	13	Our hopes for the next few years Mission Action Plan (MAP).....	18
About St Nicholas and St Mary's.....	4	Worship.....	13	The challenges ahead for the Benefice.....	19
Who we are	4	Discipleship.....	14	Who God might bring	20
Mission Statement for the Benefice	4	Youth and Children.....	15	Appendices	23
Our Parishes.....	6	Pastoral care.....	15	Finance.....	22
Our Buildings.....	9	Safeguarding.....	16	Parish facts and figures.....	23
Our Teams.....	12	In our local community.....	16		
		Mission Partners.....	17		

Introduction from the Church Wardens

Thank you for considering whether St Nicholas and St Mary's churches are where God may have you serve next.

Our parish profile will hopefully give you a flavour of both churches, we are two communities but one under Jesus Christ.

There have been Christian communities in both churches for many centuries and God has blessed them over the years, sustaining and growing them by his word and spirit.

As a Benefice we were recently looking at a way of explaining ourselves and we believe we are a: -

- Bible-believing
- Jesus-proclaiming
- People-loving community.

The Benefice looks to adhere to the 39 Articles of Faith and have fully participated in Living in Love and Faith and would wish there to be no revision to Church of England doctrine and practice.

We have a passion to see our work with young people and families grow, taking out the gospel to the local housing estates, along with welcoming community groups to use the Church buildings.

We have been privileged to have strong leadership with expository Bible teaching, with a homegroup structure, discipleship courses and prayer meetings in the benefice, to enable us to grow in our knowledge, understanding of the love of the Lord Jesus, and our desire is to take that love and good news of Jesus into the local community.

Our previous Rector, who was the Chair of RENEW (locally), spent around 80% of his time in St Nicholas with the remainder at St Mary's. We have interaction between the churches with musicians and discipleship and prayer meetings. God has blessed us with good buildings, particularly St Nicholas where we now have a re-ordered building which enhances our children and young people's work and enables the local community to use the facilities.

We maintained services across the Benefice throughout the recent pandemic, with St Nicholas starting and continuing to broadcast their services online. As soon as we were legally allowed, from 5th July 2020, we have resumed meeting in person for services every week, apart from the 2nd lockdown from 8th – 29th November 2020. Moving forward, we are looking for a Rector who will lead, challenge,

and empower us to be the body of Christ, even if this means moving us out of our comfort zones.

As you read this parish profile and prayerfully consider God's call, using a nautical term, we are looking for someone to navigate us under the direction of Jesus as we seek God's way forward for both churches.

We are excited at what God may be calling us to and we are looking forward to the next chapter in the lives of both churches.

If you would like an informal chat to ask any questions, please contact us via St Nicholas [website](#) or St Marys [Website](#)



Eunice, Mike and Karen

Person Specification

The Benefice are looking for a committed conservative evangelical who:

- is someone who knows the Lord personally and submits to the supreme authority of Scripture
- is committed to the priority of consecutive expository preaching
- is committed to the priority of prayer – personally and to developing the prayer life of the churches
- is committed to “doing the work of an evangelist”, motivating the congregations in evangelistic outreach
- will seek to develop and motivate church members to serve in the church
- is a compassionate, sensitive pastor who can relate to people of all backgrounds and who will continue to develop pastoral care in the churches
- will build contacts and relationship with the local community in the parishes, for example schools.

The Benefice is predominantly conservative evangelical. St Nicholas supports Gafcon and endorses the Jerusalem Declaration, and it is also a supporter of ReNew and the Church Society. We would wish the new Rector to continue these commitments.

The churches in the Benefice have greatly benefitted from Bible preaching and teaching ministry in recent years, and we want this to continue and to be built on. This includes preaching that is faithful to biblical truth, including where this may be unpopular in secular culture (including parts of the C of E).

The new Rector will need to have strong confidence in God’s sovereignty, in the power of God’s word and the Holy Spirit to bring people to salvation, and to grow and mature the church, even when there are discouragements, and the work seems a ‘hard slog’!

The new Rector will have a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour, will be a compassionate ‘people person’, approachable and who can easily relate to people of all social, economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds.

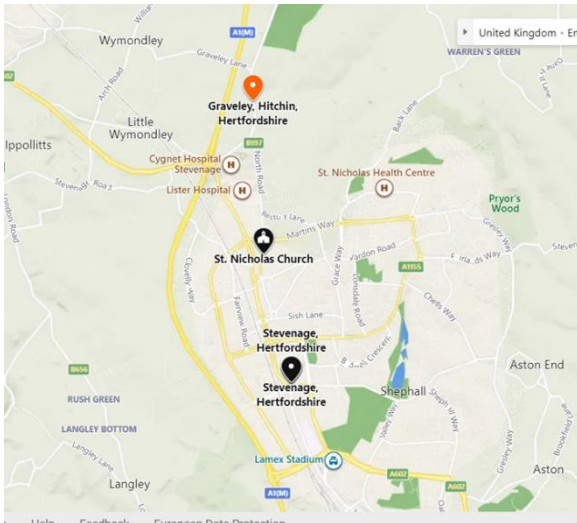
It is essential that preaching relates to a culture where not all are from academic backgrounds and/or not all have church background, (but not minimising people’s ability to understand by the Holy Spirit). But at the same time, the preaching should feed committed Christians in the church deepening our understanding of the gospel and God’s grace in Christ, and our response to it in growing obedience and holiness.

Both churches adhere to the Biblical understanding of sexual ethics, sexuality and gender. We therefore will not support any change of doctrine on marriage or in practice in these matters away from the traditional Biblical understanding.

About St Nicholas and St Mary's Who we are

The parish of St Nicholas Stevenage extends around the northern edge of the Borough of Stevenage and includes parts of both the historic old town and Stevenage new town, built after World War II. It also includes some of the most recent housing development at Great Ashby.

The parish of St Mary's Graveley adjoins the northern boundary of St Nicholas, extending around to the east, and falls mainly within the area of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). Whilst the church sits on the edge of the village of Graveley, the parish itself includes large swathes of countryside and a large part of the Great Ashby neighbourhood.



The Benefice was formed in 1998, bringing together two parishes, St. Nicholas Stevenage, and St. Mary's Graveley. We are part of the [Diocese of St Albans](#). Details of each parish can be found in the next section.

The Benefice is predominantly conservative evangelical, and:

- Is committed to the supreme authority of Scripture and expository preaching,
- St Nicholas has endorsed the Jerusalem Declaration of GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference).

St. Nicholas is also a supporter of RENEW and The Church Society. Our response to Living in Love and Faith (LLF) was to reject all attempts to revise the Church of England doctrine and practice.

While we do not follow the Lectionary, services are styled around the Book of Common Worship and consecutive expository preaching by working through books of the Bible.

As we move forward, we would build on those foundations of both traditional and contemporary worship, with the desire that people would know and love Jesus more and

others would come to know him as their own Saviour.

St. Nicholas Church is also used by community groups. More details can be found on page 14.

Mission Statement for the Benefice

We are a Bible-believing, Jesus-proclaiming, people-loving community. As such we remain **grounded in the Bible**, which we believe to be God's inspired, infallible Word. We want to be **greater in likeness to Jesus** and are committed to deepening our discipleship. We commit ourselves to **going out to make new disciples**, taking the good news of Jesus to our Parish, town and further beyond in word and deed to make new disciples. As God's gathered people, we want to **grow closer to one another**, building deep, loving friendships. And we want to do all this, as well as we can, **for the glory of God**.



St Mary's, Graveley

Our Congregation/Church Family

Across the churches in our Benefice, we have people from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Latvia, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Taiwan, India, Sri Lanka and Australia. Our church family is a mix of ages across the generations. Some who have plenty and others who struggle to make ends meet. Single people and married people. Some who love traditional liturgy and formal worship, and some who prefer the contemporary, the contemplative or the exuberant. People of all kinds, from all backgrounds, from many different places worship together each Sunday.



St Nicholas, Stevenage

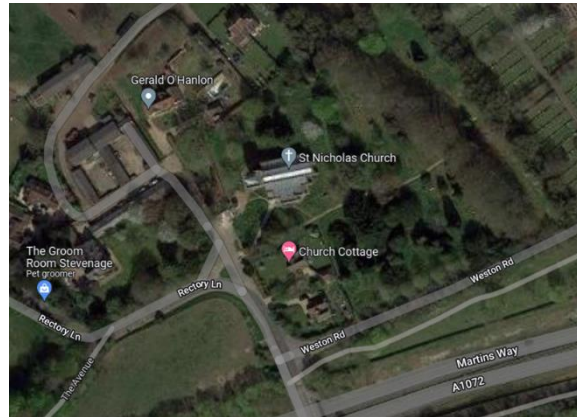
Our Parishes

St Nicholas Church – Stevenage

The parish of St Nicholas is situated in Stevenage and has a parish population of 14,192.¹ Stevenage is situated just off the A1(M) some 15 miles north of the M25 and 27 miles north of London at the northern edge of Hertfordshire. Stevenage is to the east of junctions 7 and 8 of the A1(M) between Letchworth Garden City to the north and Welwyn Garden City to the south. In 1946, it was designated the United Kingdom's first New Town under the New Towns Act and in 2021 had a population of 89,500² with an expectation that it will be over 90,000 by 2030. The vast majority of the population (over 83%)³ are white with no other ethnic group predominating.

Whilst employment figures are high for Stevenage, it is not by any means a wealthy area with many of the jobs being relatively low paid. This reflects the fact that Stevenage falls below the national average for education attainment at age 16. Just over 20% of the housing stock is still in local authority control and over 75% of the town's housing stock falls into the bottom 3 council tax boundaries – far above the national average. Whilst some of

the most expensive housing in the town is found in our parish, the St Nicholas estate- by



far the largest part of the parish - is also one of the poorest.

History

The earliest Saxon settlement of wooden buildings, probably a collection of scattered farmsteads, was originally adjacent to the site of the present St Nicholas Church and was probably established in the 7th century. In the 11th century the name "Stevenage" emerged, with early variants including "Stigenace" and "Stithenace", the meaning of which is generally accepted as "at the stiff or strong oak".

The boundaries of Stevenage parish were defined at about 1100 and were unchanged for

850 years. The church in this time was enlarged and embellished. Stevenage was in the Diocese of Lincoln.

In the early 12th century, a thick-walled flint tower was built onto the church, and the Saxon church was replaced by a Norman one.

In the 13th century, the town moved away from the church to the Great North Road and most of the church was completely rebuilt at this time, leaving just the tower. The church was next expanded in the 15th century; the aisles were widened, the chancel was rebuilt, and the spire was added.

In 1841, the number of seats in the church was increased from 314 to 634.

As Stevenage expanded in the 1850s, a new church was needed as the population reached 2,118. In 1861, Holy Trinity Church, was built for the residents of new roads in the south of Stevenage and Stevenage was placed in the Diocese of St Albans.

¹ Parish Population taken from [2011 Census](#)

² Population change in Stevenage from [ONS](#)

³ Diversity profile for Hertfordshire from [Herts Insight](#)

When Stevenage was designated the first new town in 1946, those concerned with the new town realised that new centres for people to meet were needed to create a sense of community, so several new churches were built. In 1970, the ecclesiastical parish of Stevenage was divided into seven parishes, each with its own church. In 1998, the parish of St Nicholas was joined with that of St Mary's, Graveley.

St Mary's - Graveley

The parish of St Mary's sits on the edge of the village of Graveley, the parish itself includes large areas of countryside and a large part of the Great Ashby neighbourhood. Housing in



Graveley village is very mixed and the population is older in profile, whilst the housing in Great Ashby is modern, suiting many younger households. There is a proposal for a further 1,700 houses to be built between Graveley and Stevenage.

Graveley grew from a mainly agricultural community and now has a village population of 487, occupying 198 houses⁴.



Graveley also has 50 permanent mobile homes at Jack's Hill Park, to the north of the village. The village has three pubs, a Village Hall, a golf centre, some businesses including a fruit farm and dog training, a privately run Residential home, a school, a pre-school, a children's playground, and a duck pond. Some families

have lived in the village for many generations, and others have moved in more recently.



The village has an active Parish Council, and the Village Hall is run by a board of Trustees. Being a small community, members of the church congregation are involved in many village activities and others who do not attend services take an active interest in supporting the church.

The neighbourhood of Great Ashby straddles both the St Nicholas and Graveley parishes and has a current population of 5,706⁵.

Great Ashby has been built over the last 15 years and is still growing. There is a

⁴ Data taken from [2011 Census](#)

⁵ Data taken from [2011 Census](#)

neighbourhood centre with shops, a community centre and a primary school.

Between the two parishes there are some 21,900 inhabitants. The two parishes contain within them the Lister Hospital, which has been recently expanded to become a major health resource in the county. There is also a privately run psychiatric hospital, two NHS hospitals providing elderly dementia care and several sheltered housing courts for the elderly.

Employment in the Benefice

In addition to the shopping in the neighbourhood centres, within the Benefice there is a florist, funeral directors and two restaurants around the Bowling Green at the end of the High Street. A Sainsbury super store is located by Junction 8 of the A1(M). There are many more shops and restaurants in the wider area, Old Town High Street, New Town Centre, and Retail Parks. There are plans to develop the Medicines Research Centre in Gunnels Wood Road to double the headcount on the GlaxoSmithKline site, giving rise to further employment opportunities. Other major employers in Stevenage include MBDA and Airbus, with the Lister Hospital in the benefice. There is also a wide variety of smaller enterprises. Many people work in London and elsewhere, whilst many jobs in the town are filled by people living outside of Stevenage.

There is also a small industrial area in the northeast of the parish of St Nicholas with several manufacturing and service units and a brown field site being in filled with housing. The neighbourhood centre on the St Nicholas estate includes shopping, a doctor's surgery, and a community centre. There is a further doctor's surgery in the Old Town on the southwestern edge of the parish.

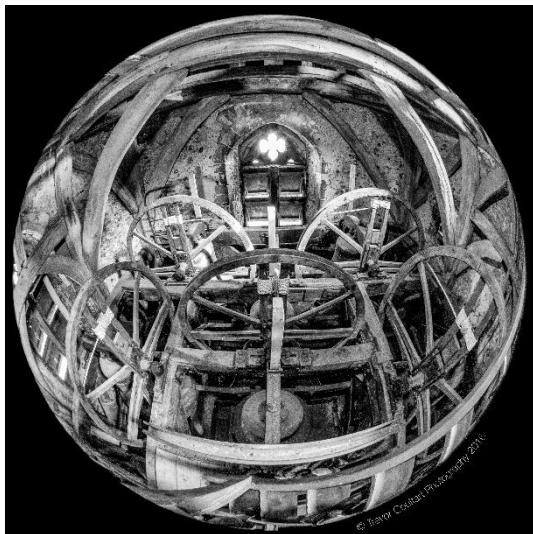
Other Churches

Other churches in St Nicholas parish include Great Ashby Community Church (GACC) and an Elim Pentecostal Church. Outside the parish, we have strong links with Grace Community Church and Longmeadow Evangelical Church. We are also a part of Churches Together in Stevenage.

Our Buildings

St Nicholas Church

There has been Christian worship on the site for almost 1000 years and the present church building occupies a hilltop site above Old Stevenage. It is a Grade I listed building and is composed of a bell tower housing 8 bells, entrance porch, nave, north and south aisles, choir, Lady chapel, Trinity chapel, and vestry. The church structure has been partially repaired and rebuilt over the last 900 years, with an organ which dates to the mid-1800s.



A major refurbishment has been carried out and this was completed in 2021. It provided the church with underfloor heating, new lighting and provision of a mezzanine floor above the existing parish room in the Victorian South extension. This has improved the lighting within the church and increased the seating capacity to accommodate the growing congregation. The church can now seat up to 250 people, mainly in pews and has a well-equipped kitchen off the parish room along with an accessible WC.

The refurbishment created a dais at the front of the church as well as in the former Lady Chapel which is now the worship group area.

We have installed an audio-visual system and services are conveyed over speakers and using screens, and we have a camera system to enable services to be live streamed.

The refurbishment also allowed us to have additional space on Sundays, along with supporting local community groups to use the church facilities.

The churchyard was closed in 1976 and is maintained by Stevenage Borough Council.



St Mary's Church

St Mary's, Graveley is a charming, small church, dating from the 1100's. It is situated on the eastern edge of the village nestling in farmland and the beautiful Hertfordshire countryside and is surrounded by farm buildings, a few of which have been converted to homes.

Now on the fringe of Graveley, the church



would have been at the heart of the original settlement before housing migrated to be close to the great north road which runs through the centre of the village today. Built of flint with stone dressing, the church comprises a nave, chancel, north aisle, tower, vestry and porch and has some very interesting features. In the 13th century chancel is a rare, early, double pillar piscina, similar to the one found in Jesus College Cambridge.



There are also attractive stained glass windows containing cathedral glass and the 15th century screen was found, within living memory, to have traces of coloured painting.



The tower, with a working clock, contains 6 bells that are rung regularly for services – the oldest bell was made in 1589. The seating is all in pews but although small the church at full capacity is able to seat about 120 people.

The churchyard is still open and very well kept with many villagers choosing to be buried or have their ashes interred there. The grass is professionally cut but all other churchyard maintenance is done by volunteers from the church family and village.

The Vicarage

The vicarage is located approximately one mile away from St Nicholas Church and is close to Stevenage Old Town. It is a large four-bedroom house which was constructed in the 1960s, with a large integral garage and double-glazed windows.



The accommodation includes a kitchen and utility room, separate dining and living rooms, cloakroom and study downstairs.

Upstairs there are four double bedrooms, an ensuite shower room and family bathroom.



It has a large garden which has been well maintained, and as there are no external areas at the church, it has often been used for church functions, the most recent being a Benefice Summer BBQ.



Our Teams

The Benefice doesn't have the advantage of any licenced or retired ministers, either lay or ordained. Our next Rector will be fully supported by a strong dedicated team of people who are ready to build on the mission and ministry of the two existing, and distinctive congregations, as well as exploring new ways of outreach in our local community.

We have a large group of engaged people who give their time to serve and support in a variety of ways across both churches, established Men's and Women's groups, strong PCCs, and administrative support, safeguarding teams and mechanisms in place to communicate information to our Church Family both weekly and monthly by email and on our website.

This is an exciting opportunity within our Benefice to build on some very firm foundations, and to grow both churches in faith and in number.

St Nicholas

We have two Church Wardens, a PCC, and a part time Church Administrator, along with a team of Welcomers who meet and greet the congregation at Sunday Services.

Members of the congregation also assist the Rector with the Sunday services including those who lead the service, read the word, and

lead the prayers, along with the audio-visual team, and prayer ministry.

We have a group of bell ringers, who ring on Sunday before the service, some of whom ring in both churches.

For the upkeep and the preparation of the services we have a dedicated group of people who spend time creating beautiful flower displays most weeks in church, along with teams of people who regularly clean inside the church, maintain the building and surrounding grounds and carry out regular maintenance works.

St Mary's

There is currently only one churchwarden at St Mary's but there is a vacancy for a second one. We have a PCC of 8 members excluding the Rector. Nearly everyone within the church family participates in the services or in the running of the church. Whilst welcomers give a warm greeting at the start of the services others provide refreshments for social interaction at the end.

There is a band of bellringers practising weekly that ring for every service. Dedicated and talented flower arrangers make the church look beautiful on a weekly basis and it always looks stunning for all the festivals, in particular

for the candle lit carol service which is always very well attended – usually to full capacity.



What we do

Services

Both churches in the Benefice have services each Sunday, alternating between Service of the Word and Communion. A new pattern of services will be implemented during the interregnum.

St Nicholas

Our Sunday service is at 9:30am each week. Attendance averages about 70 adults, with others attending online by live stream. Each service includes hymns and songs, readings from the Bible, prayers, a time of confession and expository teaching to help us understand what God has to say to us today. Services are often led by members of the congregation. The service lasts around 75 minutes, and coffee and tea are served after the service.

Each week there are age-appropriate groups for children, although children are most welcome to stay in the main service with their parents.

We currently have 80 people on the Electoral Roll.

As well as Sunday services held weekly, we also have regular mid-week services on Wednesdays. Our services follow a regular monthly pattern.

St Mary's

Sunday services are at 11.30am with the pattern of services as follows:

1st Sunday – Holy Communion

2nd Sunday - Service of the Word

3rd Sunday – Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion

4th Sunday – Service of the Word

5th Sunday – Service of the Word

Services are led by the Rector with members of the congregation leading the intercessions and doing the readings.

Refreshments of tea, coffee and cakes are served after the service on the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Sundays.

There are approximately 20 people who attend each week with the number generally rising to about 30 on choir Sundays. Despite attendance at church being quite low, the villagers are very supportive of church life. We currently have 30 people on the Electoral Roll.

There are a few young children who attend church with their parents at present but there are no facilities within the church to run a children's group. The PCC and warden are keen to start a Sunday school which will be held in the Village Hall.

Worship

St Nicholas

Music and worship are an integral part of our church services. We use a range of music, including:

- Contemporary worship songs
- Music suited to young children and families
- Traditional hymns

We would be seen to have a contemporary style of worship, along with traditional hymns.

Over the past 5 years or so, we have strengthened and expanded our contemporary repertoire and style, without losing our traditional worship.

As we move forward, we would like to continue to build on these foundations, with Biblically grounded styles of worship, to praise, worship and inspire people to know Jesus more.



St Mary's

The style of worship is traditional, with mostly traditional hymns but also some contemporary worship songs.



The organ is used to provide all the music for weekly Sunday services and festivals, and we are fortunate to have local organists who play for us. There is a robed choir of 12 that sings for the first communion service of every month and for festivals and weddings.

Discipleship

House, study, and prayer groups

Across the Benefice we currently have 4 Bible study groups that meet in homes and a discipleship group that meets at church. In previous years we have also run Lent courses, on several occasions with other churches in the town.

We meet to pray as a church every week alternating between 7-8am Tuesday mornings via Zoom and Wednesday evenings in church, when some time is spent in sung worship.

As a Benefice we hold a baptism preparation course at regular intervals throughout the year. These are run over three consecutive Tuesday evenings, and whilst parents must attend, godparents are also invited. We are also committed to running termly courses for people to explore the claims of Jesus. These have included Christianity Explored, Hope Explored and the Identity Course.

Evangelism and Outreach

St Nicholas

We have a small team of people who go out door to door. We have recently completed the entire parish of St Nicholas and have started to go round again building up relationships. Last November we started a Hot Chocolate stop outside St Nicholas on a Thursday afternoon 2.30pm - 4.15pm which has drawn in dog walkers and secondary school children. We started off with a handful of children, but we now have up to 40 children stopping each afternoon and we have been building up relationships with them and are now looking to take another step forward with them.

St Mary's

Before the pandemic a bible study group, led by the Rector, was run at the private Cygnet Psychiatric Hospital in Graveley. Over the recent years several service users have been able to join services at St Mary's and one was confirmed in 2016. This group is yet to restart.

Youth and Children

St Nicholas

Prior to Covid and our major refurbishment project which closed the church building for a year, we hosted a Church Mother and Toddler Group called Little Lambs, a Brownie pack, a non-church Mother and Toddlers' group and a support group for foster carers. The foster carers' group has now restarted, and we are hopeful that the other groups will be re-established.

There are four primary schools, Almond Hill Junior, Giles Nursery and Infants, Giles Junior, and The Leys Primary School located within the parish. Our previous Rector undertook assemblies at three of these schools.

The church is also linked with St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, formerly located in the parish but now in the new town centre parish of St Andrew and St George. St Nicholas can nominate parishioners to become foundation governors at the school.

Three secondary schools, The Thomas Alleyne Academy, Barclay Academy, and Saint John Henry Newman (Roman Catholic) are in the parish, but we currently have limited contact with them.

St Mary's

Graveley village has a Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School with approximately 100 children on the roll. The core Christian values of fellowship, creativity and harmony shape the school and collective Bible based worship takes place daily. Two of the school governors are appointed by the Diocese and are therefore put forward by St Mary's PCC. One of these governors is usually the Vicar/Rector. The previous Rector had close links to the school, serving as governor, planning the collective worship on a 3-year cycle, visiting the school to take assemblies every two weeks and taking occasional lessons on the Christian faith. The school children attend the church at Christmas and Easter for services previously planned by the Rector and there is a leavers' service at the end of the summer term, the church presenting each leaver with a Bible.

There is also a pre-school in the village that meets in the village hall during term-time.

Pastoral care

St Nicholas

We have a team of 7 people who are part of the pastoral team, and it would be good to extend this number. There are also an additional two people who are happy to help with shopping. Everyone has completed all their safeguarding courses and are up to date with them.

We have a small, trained prayer ministry team which offers to pray with people directly after the morning service.

St Mary's

St Mary's also offers pastoral visits to members of the church family and to the local nursing home. Prior to Covid restrictions regular communion services, Songs of Praise and carol singing were held in the home. The staff there are keen to restart these as soon as possible.

Safeguarding

St Nicholas

St Nicholas is fully committed to safeguarding as an integral part of the life and ministry of the Church. We see safeguarding as the practical outworking of the Christian way of life and in accord with the example of Christ's ministry towards all. Through our Policy and Procedure which can be found on our [website](#) we look to:

- Ensure the welfare of children, young people and adults.
- Work to prevent abuse from occurring.
- Seek to protect those who are at risk of being abused.
- Respond effectively to those who have been abused.

We will also take care to identify where a person may present a risk to others and offer support to them whilst taking steps to avoid any risks they pose. Although safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone at St Nicholas, we have a team to lead and support this important work.

St Mary's

At St Mary's, Graveley we aim to foster a safe environment for people to explore the Christian faith and build supportive relationships. St Mary's is committed to a rigorous Safeguarding Policy and has a designated Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO). All persons in a position of authority have ongoing Safeguarding training and have regular

DBS checks. All information regarding contacts and helplines is available to see in church and on St Mary's website, and this includes our Policies, Procedures and Risk Assessments which can also be found on the Church [website](#)

Our church wishes to care for and ensure the welfare of children, young people and adults and to protect all parishioners and those in positions of authority to the best of our ability including ourselves. We wish to prevent abuse or harm occurring by having the awareness of possible danger scenarios, but also to respond effectively, timely and with appropriate steps and support, those who may have been abused. Our PSO will lead this work but ultimately it is the responsibility of all in the church family to look out and care for each other and inform the PSO of any suspected problems.

In our local community

St Nicholas

Through our links with Bridge Builders (a local Christian charitable trust focusing on children's work and young families in primary schools and churches) and our own efforts, we try to make use of the excellent opportunities that are available with the primary schools in our Benefice. Each year, along with other churches in the town, we are actively involved in, and frequently host, the Easter Journey (a Bridge Builders initiative which allows year 6 children to engage with the Easter story) and the Christmas Journey (a dramatic retelling of the Christmas story aimed at children in Year 2). Both initiatives draw over 1000 children into the town's churches. We also host several schools throughout the year who bring their children to explore Christian faith and practice in our historic setting.

The refurbishment has allowed us to offer the church to be used by local groups, this includes AA, a Foster Caring group, the Allotment Society, and we have a range of music societies which use the church building for concerts. We also offer the building to other local churches for quiet days and other similar events.

St Mary's

Villagers have provided financial support for the churchyard grass-cutting and last year there was a very generous collection for the repair of the church clock. There is always a good turn-out for the annual fundraising event of Teas in the churchyard.



The village of Graveley is very community-spirited, participating in many activities, one example being table tennis. The village hosts and runs a table tennis league in the Hall. There is a Yoga club, 2 book clubs and a fortnightly book swap that takes place in the church and was started after the loss of the visiting library bus. There is also a very active cricket club.



The Village Hall committee puts on coffee mornings several times a year with the purpose of trying to bring the community together. Most recently the Village Hall hosted a Platinum Jubilee celebratory lunch in honour of the Queen's 70 years on the throne which was very much enjoyed and well attended. This lunch followed a special Thanksgiving service in the church.



Mission Partners

As a Benefice, we support the [Barnabas Fund](#) to help persecuted Christians around the world; [Crosslinks](#), where we support a young couple in Kampala, Uganda; and [Church Mission Society \(CMS\)](#) where we have a mission partner in Florianopolis, Brazil. We also support a local Christian charity [Bridge Builders](#) in their outreach to school children. We aim to donate 10% of our annual income to our mission partners, currently divided between Bridge Builders (40%), Barnabas Fund (20%), Crosslinks Uganda (20%) and CMS in Brazil (20%).

Where we are going

Our hopes for the next few years Mission Action Plan (MAP)

Both [St Nicholas](#) and [St Mary's](#) churches have detailed MAPs available on their websites.

St Nicholas

During the spring of 2022 the PCC prayerfully reconsidered our previous MAP and have now drawn up the new mission action plan for 2022-2024. The MAP was formally adopted by the PCC at their meeting in May 2022. Our new MAP states that we are "a Bible-believing, Jesus-proclaiming, people-loving community".

The MAP is broken down into several headings: the church is a place of worship, discipleship, and learning, it is a base camp for mission in the parish and the world and a place of welcome for all in the community.

The MAP sets out our priorities for the coming 3 years which include a renewed focus on our children and youth work, the re-establishment of various ministries to the elderly and lonely, and our commitment to be a church that takes the good news of Jesus out to our parishes and beyond. For example, we have benefitted from a recent training course from the London City Mission. We are keen to grow this ministry

and ensure that making new disciples remains a high priority for the church.

As part of this commitment, we have hosted 2 mission weeks with help from students on the Cornhill Bible Training Course, and this year we have partnered with other churches in Stevenage and North Herts on the Passion for Life Mission.

There are many more opportunities yet untapped, or that have grown dormant through Covid, such as a ministry in the many nursing homes or sheltered housing developments in our parishes.

St Nicholas MAP lists the restarting of a messy-church style Sunday afternoon service for families as one of our targets for the coming years. We are also considering whether we might be able to start some new gathering in the St Nicholas community centre. The opportunities are many!

In the previous couple of years, prior to the pandemic, the Benefice has held two weekends away and a weekend at home. These times of fellowship, food and concentrated Bible teaching have proved very popular and successful in deepening faith and relationships.

There are also huge opportunities which we have yet to seize. These include building further links with the secondary schools in our parishes, strengthening our pastoral follow up to funerals and baptisms, and building on the ongoing work of discipleship amongst our infrequent attendees.

St Mary's

The aspirations of St Mary's Graveley are detailed in the Mission Action Plan. This has been accepted by the PCC as a strategy for achieving our mission and objectives set out in the Parish Profile. The priority in the MAP focuses on growing the church community, especially starting a Sunday school to draw younger families to join the church. To inform this, there are specific interventions required which include improving the facilities at St Mary's Church to include a toilet and kitchen facilities. Consequently, there are cost implications associated with a project of this nature and diverse ways of securing funding remains a significant challenge.

In keeping with the wider Benefice strategy for church growth, St Mary's also aspires to:

- Re-launch and sustain a home bible study group in the village
- Carry out regular door to door visiting in the parish
- Continue to form strong links with Graveley CE School with the overarching aim of sharing the good news of Jesus.

The annual fund-raising event of cream teas and the public opening of the maze in the village remains a popular event, where there are opportunities to introduce the church and the word of God to those who attend. An aspect of the Mission Action Plan is to engage

visitors to the church by producing a booklet which depicts the rich history and architecture of the church.

In conjunction with St Nicholas Church, we are committed to spreading the gospel of Christ through shared activities such as the Lent course and discipleship groups.

The challenges ahead for the Benefice

We expect there to be challenges to our hopes and prayers, as we seek the vision for God's way forward for the Benefice.

In the Benefice we have a core of active and committed people. As we move forward, we are looking for someone to encourage all our fellowship to see their God-given gifts and offer them for service. This will need the right level of training for those who will lead in all areas of church life. We would also look to develop and deepen our relationships with each other.

We have a welcome pack for those who move into the Benefice, there is a significant amount of housing development work planned and we will need a strategy for reaching those new estates, so that we will take the knowledge and the love of Jesus to them, building on our existing evangelism programme.

We have a small number of home groups which we would like to grow by encouraging people

to join, along with a structured leadership training and support strategy.

We would like to extend our current young people's work in both churches. Our need would be for identifying and training new leaders. We have also previously discussed the possibility of the employment of a youth worker.

Mission and Evangelism in the local community does not always bring people to faith as we would like. Again, the workers are few and a strategy built on the existing foundations and programme would be helpful.

There is much commitment to prayer in services, home groups and personally. We have at least one communal benefice prayer meeting each week, however, there is low attendance. It would be good to develop the habit of meeting together to pray.

St Mary's currently has no kitchen or w.c. facility; the challenge would be to provide these facilities in a listed building along with the necessary finance.

Who God might bring

Summary of Parish Profile Questionnaire to Church Family Members

The Churchwardens [and PCCs] of both churches instigated a questionnaire of the congregations asking what they wanted for their new Rector.

Over 40 responses came from across the Benefice, the majority from St Nicholas.

Precise questioning such as requiring clear yes/no or select preference which would lead to a numerical record of answers, was not used. Rather the questions were general, and therefore what follows only gives a brief flavour of the dominant themes that emerged. Views were sought by asking these 4 questions: Character traits of the new Rector; preaching style; vision for the church; and other comments.

This gives a flavour of the responses from both churches. Nuances or themes that differ between the two churches are noted.

Character traits

The responses from both churches expressed a desire for a dynamic and deeply compassionate 'people-person' who is able to relate well to and reach out to and welcome people of all abilities, social and educational backgrounds, ethnicity and ages; someone who knows the Lord, has Christ at the centre of their life, and who exudes a love for the Lord.

Examples of phrases used were, "good pastoral skills", "patient", "approachable", "understanding", "good listener", "empathy". "Dynamic, inspirational, enthusiastic and encouraging." "A man of integrity in his relationships", "proven record of good leadership", "humble", "Lives a life of example", "a love of the Lord and His people", "A worshipping Christian", "Spiritually minded".

The theme of a good delegator came up in some of St Nicholas' responses: e.g. "motivating people to volunteer, letting them get on with it, but providing support as necessary". St Mary's, similarly, mentioned the need to "Bring others together to take a more active role in the church", and "support additional training within the church".

Preaching style

The overwhelming desire in responses from both congregations was for faithful Bible-based preaching that teaches Biblical truth.

Comments from St Nicholas stressed the "not compromising preaching even if it was uncomfortable/unpopular". Some specifically mentioned "the need to preach the gospel".

St Mary's included similar responses, including that "God's standards and requirements cannot be re-defined or re-shaped by mankind".

Other examples of comments from St Nicholas: "can relate to a wide range of believers and enquirers", "ability to explain Scripture in truth and not swayed by popular culture and ideology", "engaging, clear and concise", "excellent Bible knowledge and expository preaching", "Straight Bible teaching, preaching the Word in the power of the Spirit, giving the gospel at every opportunity".

St Mary's responses included: "Relate to events in the world and our community and use anecdotal experience", and "Hope-filled".

Some responses in both churches asked for use of visual aids, with St Nicholas ones mentioning good use of technology.

Of those who commented on style of delivery, most expressed a desire for an informal, relaxed style. St Mary's mentioned "easy-going".

A few of St Nicholas' responses commented on sermon length, with an even mix of responses wanting short/10 minutes, others wanting 15 or 20 minutes max.

Response from St Mary's included, 'Interesting, succinct and short – aim for a sermon of 15-20 minutes max'

Vision

The two main themes emerging in the St Nicholas responses were:

- build on the work of the previous Rector, maintaining growth.
- Reach out to grow the congregation, with several responses emphasising younger people/families/youth/children

St Mary's responses also expressed a desire to reach out evangelistically to those who don't

yet believe, "encouraging the young". The church should be welcoming for newcomers. St Mary's added, "Capitalise on long-standing loyalty to the church from many people in the village to encourage them to regularly attend". Working with those who have difficulties in their lives was also mentioned.

Other themes expressed in St Nicholas' responses:

- some said both traditional and modern should be catered for, keep mix of old and new worship
- as well as outreach, build up those already in the faith; a church where all are welcomed (but where the truth of the gospel is preached); keep focus on faithful Bible teaching/gospel ministry

Other themes expressed in St Mary's responses:

- "Be adaptable to fit well with the two parishes, one more contemporary, the other more traditional"
- Uphold and promote the core Biblical and historic beliefs of the CoE
- Effective administration and management of the church
- Promote missionary awareness
- Focus on the parish and benefice ahead of other groups within the wider church
- Offer consistent and sensitive pastoral care

Any Other Comments

Most of these comments in St Nicholas' responses are included under the other headings, e.g. build on young peoples' ministry.

Some St Nicholas responses mentioned the issue of gender, with about half saying the new Rector should be a man, and half saying it can be either.

St Mary's responses had some views saying the new Rector should be a male not in a practising same-sex relationship who has only been married once, some views explicitly stating that they would be happy with a female or male Rector.

Other comments from St Mary's:

- Maintain important link with Graveley School – ideally serving as a Governor and visiting regularly
- Upcoming 800-year anniversary since the first Rector of Graveley was appointed in 1224!

Appendices

Finance

St Nicholas

Resources

Excluding the income and expenditure related to the one-off building revitalisation programme, which was signed off in 2021 and financially concluded, with no outstanding debt, in April 2022.

Incoming resources for the year ended 31st Dec 2021 - **£84,469**

- Planned Giving/Collections (Inc Gift Aid) £66,960
- Other Activities £17,509

Resources expended for the year ended 31st Dec 2021 - **£107,776**

- Parish Share 2021 £63,170
- Mission Giving 2021 £8,575
- Church Running Expenses £18,237
- Other Activities £17,794

In the year ended 31st Dec 2021 the resource expended was £107,776 showing an excess of £21,810 expenditure over income compensated by cash reserves.

A deferred Parish Share of £36,377 from 2019 is currently being addressed by way of monthly instalment repayment.

Compared to 2020, our planned giving decreased by 45% and collections in church decreased by 61%. It is expected/hoped that as the congregation returns and grows as the result of our live streaming and other outreach efforts giving will return to pre pandemic levels.

For full details of the St. Nicholas Church Finances please see the Trustees Annual Report for 2021 to be found [here](#).

Hawkes Trust Fund

The Hawkes Will Trust Fund was established in 2008 following the receipt of a legacy of approximately £1,000,000 designated solely for the maintenance and repair of the fabric of the St Nicholas Church building. The incumbent and church wardens are trustees with The St Albans Diocesan Board of Finance acting as custodian trustees. The PCC apply to the trustees for grants to cover specific items which are paid to the PCC following approval by the trustees.

Funds have been used for some maintenance as well as minor and major repairs, including £650,000 towards the revitalization project in 2019-21.

The Hawkes Trust balance now stands at approximately £220,000 and the trustees have agreed to use it solely for repairs in the future and not maintenance.

St Mary's

Resources

There is no outstanding debt.

Incoming resources for the year ended 31st Dec 2021 - **£25,682**

- Planned Giving/Collections (Inc Gift Aid) £12,462
- Other Activities £13,220

Resources expended for the year ended 31st Dec 2021 - **£24,084**

- Parish Share 2021 £13,000
- Mission Giving 2021 £1,250
- Church Running Expenses £9,834

Compared to 2020, our planned giving decreased by 43% however collections in church increased by 37%.

Parish facts and figures

St Nicholas - Stevenage

Parish Population (2018)⁶



Parish area



Main religion



St Mary's – Graveley

Parish Population (2018)⁷



Parish area



Main religion



⁶ Parish Population taken from [interactive Church of England parish map](#)

⁷ Parish Population taken from [interactive Church of England parish map](#)