BENEFICE PROFILE

We aim to know Christ better and to make Christ better known

St Mary Magdalene Taunton and St John the Evangelist Taunton
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All quotes are taken from the church visitors' books
Who we are

We are on the cusp of an exciting new era. As Taunton itself expands and develops as a garden town, St Mary Magdalene church is to be designated as Taunton Minster. Encouraged and supported by the Borough Council (now to be West Somerset and Taunton District Council), this raising of our profile offers significant interdependent opportunities for our benefice of St Mary Magdalene and St John the Evangelist to play a wider role in the town’s regeneration and in serving the spiritual needs of a growing and changing town.

These opportunities could include

- Increasing our civic profile: opportunity to develop Christian leadership through establishing a Minster Council for the benefit of the town community and forging stronger links with the County Council and the Courts
- Engaging culture and the arts: opportunity to increase involvement through the Arts Taunton initiative
- Developing educational programmes: opportunity to grow links with (e.g.) Bridgwater & Taunton College promoted by the local MP to become the university of Somerset
- Developing the relationship with Wells Cathedral: open and explore new possibilities for mission in the south west of the Diocese

And we aspire to grow our younger congregations through collaboration with St James’ church, increase the space we offer for our already successful community outreach activities, harness the venue-hire potential of our beautiful historic buildings, whilst being true to our liturgical roots and faithful to those in our congregations who value tradition.

Together, we aim to know Christ better and to make Christ better known

By being

- a town centre focus for Christian witness and outreach
- a welcoming place where people of all ages can come to know the love of God
- a worshipping community who seek to follow the Gospel commandment to ‘love your neighbour’

And offering

- prayerful spaces where all can experience love
- historic buildings which are beacons of hope for the people of Taunton

Our Vision

Re-imagining our Ministry

- Establish a Mission Hub for young families, youth and children through the development of the Cottage in the churchyard
- Appoint a worker with families and young people
- Develop and celebrate the peace and quiet of silent prayer which draws people in from diverse places to sit and pray or to enjoy the mystery of God’s presence
- Provide guided prayer – reaching out as a church in a gentle, non-judgmental and inclusive way
- Grow our working together as a benefice supporting each other particularly in our differing expressions of worship, our links with other town centre churches and organisations, and in our publicity
- Promote the use of the gifts and talents of our members to support the development of missional projects across the Benefice
Growing the church

- Through our outward focus in particular supporting the Taunton Team Chaplaincy
- Extend Magdalene’s Coffee Shop to meet the growing demand and to provide a larger social and meeting space for church groups
- Support the development of our mission outreach
- Implement plan to grow the number of Choristers and musicians
- Further develop publicity opportunities through use of social media outlet and local signage
- Grow collaborative relationships with the URC, Temple Methodist, Taunton Vineyard and St James’

Seeking the Common Good

- Develop wider recognition of the need for a Christian response to the challenges we face to protect our environment
- Identify opportunities for minimising waste and implement solutions to environmental issues within our church environs

“ There for all. An open door ”
Who we are looking for

The priorities and tasks we can do

- As a benefice identify and help develop the gifts and talents of our members
- Grow together as a benefice, supporting each other through study groups, mission activities and administrative tasks
- At St Mary’s, work to fund the extension of the Coffee Shop and Mission Hub, and to raise the money needed to restore the tower
- Grow the Choristers and musicians to support Family Worship at St Mary’s
- Provide pastoral support for the housebound, those in care homes and the sick

The priorities and tasks we need our incumbent to do

- Help open our eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives through inspiring worship, preaching and study
- Join us by leading the development of new mission opportunities including establishing a Minster Council, harnessing and managing the ideas, talents, enthusiasms and goodwill of individuals in our churches and the wider community
- Be a pastor offering spiritual guidance without discrimination to those within and without our churches helping us to ‘tell the story’ of our faith in loving obedience to God
- Lead the development of new initiatives focused on children, young people and families, nurturing and encouraging the growth of this ministry
- Give spiritual guidance, encouragement and consistent leadership to all who express their faith through their commitment to mission led groups in the benefice
- Support, guide and encourage those who are working to meet the financial challenges of both developing and maintaining our buildings and ministry
- Sensitively minister to the spiritual needs of the elderly in both congregations
- Continue to develop the relationship between the two parishes
The one whom God is calling

When we came together for a vision day we prayerfully sought the qualities which would best meet the needs of our benefice.

Hence we believe that God is calling us to seek an incumbent who is:

- Able to commit to, and shares our vision for St Mary Magdalene, St John the Evangelist and as a benefice, and is able to get the best from our volunteer communities in order to turn our vision into reality.
- A leader who possesses the management skills, knowledge, experience, and the energy to enable and inspire us to rise to the challenges and opportunities in our churches and benefice which are continually presented to us.
- Passionately and totally devoted to their vocation in a life of committed ministry and service to our churches, congregations, ecumenical relationships, and our connections with our town and civic authorities and broader geographical and diocesan links.
- An excellent communicator with a natural collaborative empathy and a positive outlook who will inspire us by preaching the Gospel and God’s living Word through both traditional and new creative and innovative ways, incorporating our musical and liturgical cultures.
- Someone who will promote and encourage the diversity of our respective churches and will devote time and energy to building and extending our respective congregations, further developing our inclusive and outward-looking churches, readily able to meet the challenges arising from our town centre locations and our civic links.
- Kind and compassionate, approachable, and accessible with a strong emphasis on both the spiritual and pastoral needs of our respective congregations.

This is a great opportunity for an individual to develop and extend their ministry in a rewarding but also challenging urban environment. We have set out our aspirations and if you will share our sorrows and our joys, our doubts and our glimpses of God then you probably are the one for us.
Where we are

Taunton, the county town of Somerset has a population of around 70,000 and is situated on the River Tone nestled between the Quantock, Blackdown and Brendon Hills. In 2017 it was awarded Garden Town status, making it the first such town in the South West. The town is currently undergoing a major regeneration programme which aims to provide significant additional town centre employment space, a new large retail space and over 2,000 new homes.

Transport links: There are excellent links with direct access by rail to major cities including London, Bristol, Manchester, Leeds, Cardiff, Exeter and Plymouth. The M5 runs adjacent to the town with access from junctions 25 and 26. Both Exeter and Bristol International airports are within 50 miles of Taunton.

Major employers: These include Musgrove Park Hospital, the Hydrographic Office and Debenhams Financial Office.

Leisure and the Arts: The Somerset County Cricket ground is just off the town centre. Taunton is part of the West Country Carnival Circuit, and famous for its annual Flower Show. Green areas include Vivary Park (host to concerts and the Flower Show) and Longrun Meadow which hosts the weekly ‘Park Run’ and is home to the ‘Willow Cathedral’. Other major facilities include the Castle Museum, swimming pools, gyms, a multi-screen cinema, the Brewhouse Theatre and the Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre.

Education: As well as a good choice of primary schools, there are four State secondary schools in Taunton together with three high ranking coeducational independent schools. Richard Huish College is a six-form College in the Parish of St Mary’s and, just outside the
benefice, Further Education is provided by Bridgwater and Taunton College (partner college of Plymouth University). Heathfield Community School has a post-16 Further Education college specialising in performing arts and technical theatre.

Our welcome

At both our churches we pride ourselves on the welcome we offer to all, whether on a Sunday or throughout the week. We all know that welcoming a stranger is only the first step; we need to work harder at following up and providing opportunities for conversation that they too may come to know our Lord.

And we are good at offering tea and cake! So our new incumbent will need to exercise if only to avoid the impact of our hospitality.

Working together

The parishes of St Mary Magdalene and St John the Evangelist were brought together to form a Benefice in 2014. Our two churches are very different in worshippers’ styles and membership. This presents an opportunity to show the rich diversity of the love of God.

The value in the distinctiveness of each church and their different locations within the town centre is appreciated, and the designation of St Mary Magdalene as a Minster will open up new mission opportunities for working together.

Currently we share:

- A Benefice Office
- Some services including Patronal Festivals
- Festive meals
- Churchwarden get-togethers
- Home and study groups
- Music events
- Together magazine

Together is a monthly magazine outlet for spiritual and secular writings from our Bishops, clergy and members as well as carrying reports of recent events and advertising current and future happenings.

The cost is covered by advertising and it is distributed in-house, through Magdalene’s Coffee Shop and to some 50 locations across the Benefice.

Both churches are blessed with Father Willis organs and high quality grand pianos. These enhance the reputation of the churches with their excellent acoustics for concerts of all kinds.
### Weekly services

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<th>1st Sunday</th>
<th>St Mary Magdalene</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8am Holy Communion (BCP)</td>
<td>10am Sung Eucharist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10am Family Worship (with Holy Baptism as required)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3pm Service at Calway House</td>
<td>4pm Sung Evensong (BCP)*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.30pm Holy Communion (CW)</td>
<td>*followed by occasional Benediction</td>
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<th>2nd Sunday</th>
<th>St Mary Magdalene</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<td>8am Holy Communion (BCP)</td>
<td>10am Sung Eucharist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10am Parish Communion (CW)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5pm Healing Service</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.30pm Evensong (BCP)</td>
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<th>3rd Sunday</th>
<th>St Mary Magdalene</th>
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<td>8am Holy Communion (BCP)</td>
<td>10am Sung Eucharist</td>
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<td>10am Parish Communion (CW)</td>
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<td>5pm Worship @ 5</td>
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<td>6.30pm Evensong (BCP)</td>
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<th>St Mary Magdalene</th>
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<td>8am Holy Communion (BCP)</td>
<td>10am Sung Eucharist</td>
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<td>10am Parish Communion (CW)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3pm Service at Calway House</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.30pm Evensong (BCP)</td>
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<th>5th Sunday</th>
<th>St Mary Magdalene</th>
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<td>8am Holy Communion (BCP)</td>
<td>10am Sung Eucharist</td>
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<td>10am Parish Communion (CW)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.30pm Sung Evensong (BCP)</td>
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<th>Mondays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<td></td>
<td>12noon Angelus</td>
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<td>12.45pm - 1.15pm Silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament</td>
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<th>1st Wednesdays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<tr>
<td>12.45pm Said Eucharist</td>
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<th>2nd to 5th Wednesdays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<td>11am Said Eucharist</td>
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<th>Thursdays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<tr>
<td>11am Holy Communion (CW)</td>
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<th>Fridays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<tr>
<td>8am Holy Communion (CW)</td>
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<th>Saturdays</th>
<th>St John the Evangelist</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.30am Parish prayers</td>
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Our organisation

Each Parish maintains its own PCC and finances, but the Benefice Office seeks to support both Parishes.

**St Mary Magdalene**

A training parish church for curates, St Mary’s is supported by a strong team of volunteers leading a wide variety of expressions of our faith.

The PCC has 20 members and one co-opted member. It meets quarterly. There are three sub-committees: WORSHIP, MISSION and FINANCE & PROPERTY which meet before the PCC meetings. Each PCC member is a member of one of these committees and decisions made are brought to the PCC for ratification. We have four representatives at Deanery Synod and two members of Diocesan Synod.

The Management Team meets normally every 3 weeks and deals with matters which do not need to be referred to the PCC and are not matters of governance, but it becomes the Standing Committee for the PCC if necessary. Members of the Management Team are the Vicar (Chair), Parish Administrator, the Churchwardens, the Treasurer (or Finance Officer) and a representative of the PCC.

Part-time paid staff include our Parish Administrator, caretaker with a first-aid at work and health and safety qualification, Facilities Coordinator responsible primarily for managing concerts, Director of Music and his team of organists, and the website manager.

We have three licensed Readers and two retired clergy who lead and preach at services. There are three churchwardens and a support team who help with services.

**St John the Evangelist**

The PCC has eight members and two co-opted members which meets bi-monthly. A standing committee deals with urgent matters between PCC meetings.

We have a house-for-duty Associate Vicar and an Assistant Priest who is also Lead Chaplain at the local hospital.

Two churchwardens are supported by most of the members in the running of the church. Working parties deal with general cleaning and tidying inside and out of the church.
The Vicarage

We offer our new Vicar a new-build Vicarage, quietly situated about 100 metres from St Mary Magdalene church. The garage and Benefice Office are separate but adjacent to the Vicarage:
St Mary Magdalene

Our worship and services

We offer services during the week and on Sundays in a variety of modern and traditional forms. Our main 10am Sunday service of Holy Communion is led by a robed choir of around 25 adults and at the Family service on the first Sunday each month the singing is led by a group of young robed choristers.

There is a broad range of worship styles and all Festivals are marked by special services. A number of local schools and organisations use the church especially around Christmas time.

As the County Town civic church its role is most in evidence at the annual Remembrance service.

We have a strong musical tradition and it is an important part of our worship. Our adult and children’s choirs together number over 30 members. The 3-manual Father Willis organ, built to a high specification in 1882 and currently undergoing a full renovation; this is due to be completed around Easter 2019 with formal opening celebrations in Autumn 2019. We also have a fine Blüthner grand piano.

A more informal singing and instrumental group leads the Worship@5 services, and our monthly Family Service. Music styles are eclectic, from Tallis to Taizé to Townend.

Baptisms
These are usually held as part of Family services; a service for Godparents’ Sunday was introduced this year. A challenge we face is encouraging more church members to attend Family Worship/Baptism services and so welcome and support new families on their journey of faith.

Weddings
We have helped and supported couples preparing for marriage using the FOCCUS programme.

Funerals
As well as small intimate funerals, St Mary’s is also used for large and high profile services.
Expressions of our faith

**VOICE PIC**

Is our youth discipleship group. We gather with our friends from St. James Church on Friday night at 7.45pm in St Mary’s café. We meet in the priest’s chamber (that’s where we take our name from!) where we enjoy each other’s friendship, seek to discover what it is to be a Christian, and a teenager, love Jesus, learn more about him, and have fun!

**Friendship Wednesday**

The group was established with the aim of combating loneliness and isolation. Meeting once a month, it is open to all adults and now has an average of nine ‘regulars’ who enjoy puzzles, art, board games, refreshments and friendly conversation in the welcoming surroundings of the coffee shop.

**TEKNA**

As part of the 10.00am service we provide Junior Church for children from birth to early teens. The group, known as ‘Tekna’ (Greek for ‘children’) typically has between 6-10 children. The children meet for the start of the service then after a few words from the vicar, they go off to their own group for worship and activities on the theme for the day. The children then return for Communion. Our family services are held once a month and we want to attract more families to our church.

In May St Mary’s was the centre for a multi-award winning locally focussed food and drink festival, Eat Taunton, encouraging healthy eating. It was held in and around the Church and in surrounding roads. Cooking demonstrations encouraged an increased footfall into the Church.

**Bellringing at St Mary’s**

Our new ring of bells together with a musical chime that strikes the hour and quarter hour and rings tunes four times a day, replaced an old ring of twelve bells that were notoriously difficult to ring. The easy-going nature of our new bells, set lower down the tower, has made them suitable for training new ringers and we are delighted to have 12 learners, both young and old, at present as well as a more experienced band of twelve, many of whom attend services. We ring on Sundays before the 10 am service.

**The St Mary’s website**

https://www.stmarymagdalena.taunton.org.uk/ was launched with the purpose of serving the church community but also of being a form of outreach, to show ‘outsiders’ what goes on within the church building. It continues to grow in popularity with home page viewings now exceeding 15,000 per year.

In June 2016, St Mary’s started its Facebook Page https://www.facebook.com/stmarystaunton/ It has grown organically with increasing ‘page likes’ and regular interactions.

Whilst challenging to keep both the website and Facebook page consistently up-to-date and relevant, the church’s activities generate content that sustains wide appeal and interest.

**The group was founded to offer the opportunity of a social get-together once a month. We are an informal, jolly group of people who meet on the second Wednesday afternoon of each month in the coffee shop area of the Church.**

**Wednesday Breakaway**

This group of about 6-10 mainly church members with school age children meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 10am - outside school holidays in the children’s corner. We enjoy prayer and fellowship and take part in craft activities.

**The Young Readers’ Group**

The Young Readers’ Group meets weekly. They take an active part in the worship at St Mary’s and most are on the regular morning Bible reading rota.

**MOTHERS’ UNION**

Just a Bite

Our MU group is open to all - membership is not necessary. We meet monthly to hear speakers, pray together and enjoy tea and cake. Our aim is to support the work of the MU both at home and worldwide by our fund raising activities.

**Signature Events**

Our aim is to enjoy one another’s company outside of church. We have a varied programme that suits all ages which has included garden visits, boat trips, meals, talks, beetle drives and a barn dance.
Safeguarding at St. Mary Magdalene

A close and confidential relationship between the joint parish safeguarding officers and the incumbent has been established. Regular six-monthly meetings have been held to identify needs and concerns. Those involved with children/vulnerable adults are DBS checked and, as necessary, automatically re-checked. Organising training courses within the local area has not always been easy, therefore an officer hopes to attend a “train the trainer” course to enable a more “in house” approach to some of the basic training modules.

St Mary Magdalene Flower Team

We are a small team of flower arrangers who supply the floral decoration for the church throughout the year. It is our aim to enhance the worship in church and provide extra decoration at times of celebration such as Easter and Harvest. Flower Festivals are our speciality - every 7 years!

Talking Café

Community Council for Somerset hosts a Talking Café in the coffee shop area of the church every Monday from 10am - 1pm. It is a multi-agency event providing free advice on benefits, care issues, community support, bereavement, dementia, mobility equipment, sight loss and much more. A Carers Support group organised by the Somerset carer’s service meet monthly from 10-12 noon.

Vestry/Sacristan Team

We have two teams covering 8am and 10am Sunday Holy Communion services. We prepare for services, serve the priest and clear away, order consumables, maintain upkeep of fair linen, vestments and robes.

Age range from teenage to 70+. Our challenge is to grow the size of the team.

We support the Taunton Team Chaplaincy both financially and with the volunteer chaplains. Our previous incumbent was closely involved in the development of the Chaplaincy and was a member of their Board of Trustees. The chaplaincy provides workplace volunteer chaplains to many businesses and the community in the town.

ASLAN Christian Books

Magdalene’s Book & Gift Shop

The shop within the church is now the only dedicated Christian book and gift shop in Taunton. Through its close links with “Aslan Christian Books” it supplies the needs of local churches, church members and visitors alike. Its volunteer workforce are often “listeners” to personal concerns raised by visitors.

Charis Refugees

Christian Help and Action for Refugees in Somerset www.charisrefugees.org

‘Bringing hope and transforming the lives of refugee families one life at a time.’

• Formed by Taunton Vineyard, Creech St Michael Baptist and St Mary Magdalene Churches in 2016.

• Core focus - Sponsoring and resettling refugee families in Taunton. Commitment to support each family for at least 2 years.

• Secondary aims - to encourage and support similar community sponsorship groups across the S.W. and to establish a ‘Welcome Centre’ for all refugees in Taunton.

Magdalene’s Coffee Shop

Built inside the church, has grown since its introduction in 1991. It now offers light lunches as well as coffee and homemade cakes and is open from 10am to 2pm 6 days a week. On Sundays it is used by the congregation between services to serve church members and welcome newcomers. It is a focus for the mission in the church with a team of “listeners” dedicated to look out particularly for those on their own.

The Church places great importance on homegroups as a means of getting to know each other and increasing understanding of the bible and consequently, strengthening their faith. At present there are six homegroups but we hope to expand on this number and give a higher profile to them to encourage greater membership to both current and new people in the congregation.
Parent & Toddlers
We meet every Friday morning for craft work, fellowship, snacks & singing and the session always ends in prayer.

Pastoral Care
The team visit or phone the housebound and those members who are in need. Our aim is to support and encourage those who are struggling with life issues and rejoice with those who have joys to celebrate. Licensed Lay Visitors give Home Communion when required. Both our Prayer Vine and Sunday Prayer teams provide invaluable support.

Parish Away Weekend
In Autumn 2017, our third Away Weekend was held with our Diocesan Bishop, The Rt Revd Peter Hancock, the guest speaker. The weekend included worship, communal meals, free time during Saturday with fun and games in the evening. Around 50 attended at Buckfast Abbey and, such was its success, planning has begun for the next one.

St Mary Magdalene church is Taunton’s highest capacity concert venue seating over 650 and hosts concerts by local choral groups as well as concerts by internationally known choirs (The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, The Gabrieli Choir, The BBC Singers).

From Darkness to Light has become a popular town service marking the beginning of Advent, and an Accession Service is held in February.

For information on membership and attendance please refer to the Dashboards in the Taunton Deanery:

St Mary’s members have contributed over two tonnes of food since it opened six years ago. Two members work regularly at the warehouse.

St Mary Magdalene

Expressions of our faith cont’d
Our finances and developments

Our unrestricted income in 2017 totalled around £240,000 including legacies of £34,000. General fund expenditure amounted to £215,000 including £97,000 for our Parish Share which we have always paid in full. Without our legacy income we would have been in deficit due principally to the cost of quinquennial repairs to the church.

Our General Fund unrestricted reserve amounts to £60,000 – equivalent to 4 months routine expenditure, considered by the PCC to be a prudent level. We have designated reserves of £26,000 towards the cost of enlarging the Coffee Shop and opening up the North Door access to the church and have completed fund raising (£190,000) for the long-awaited refurbishment of the organ.

It is proposed to turn the Cottage (the former church Vicarage garage, store and flat) into a Mission Hub primarily for young people and families. Full planning permission was granted in August 2018 and restricted endowment funds of £70,000 are available for this project for which grants will also be needed. It is an exciting project and, led by a youth and families’ worker, has the potential to be a focal point for growing the church:

- It is in a prime location sitting on the footpath through the churchyard between a busy town centre car park and the town centre itself - hundreds of people of all ages walk past it every day
- Being in the churchyard but not attached to the church building itself should draw in those who would not enter the church itself
- The building will be converted into a fully kitted out venue for a variety of activities for young people and families that take place within the Church and will make an excellent new home for Voice PC as well as new ventures such as Toddler Church or a Family Brunch, and as an afterschool drop-in
- Whilst primarily focused on work with children and young people, it will be a valuable community space.

The 2017 Quinquennial Report required a steeplejack survey of the 163-foot tower. This identified repair and conservation work needed to be completed within 5 years costing at £615,000. A Tower Appeal Group has been formed and is focused on seeking grants from the Lottery and appropriate charitable foundations as well as local fund raising principally through the Coffee Shop. The contribution from the shop to the Appeal in 2018 amounted to over £31,000.

Of course, with the Coffee Shop income no longer going towards the general running costs of the church, this is a challenge for our members and is likely at least initially to mean a reduction in the level of our General Fund reserve. But we trust in our Lord that this vital work will be funded and our new work amongst children and families will help to build His kingdom here in Taunton.

“For where your treasure is, your heart will be also” Matthew 6:21

The PCC of St Mary Magdalene Taunton is a registered Charity no 1134818. The 2017 Accounts can be accessed by this link to our website:


Please also see:

www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-parishes/finances/for-treasurers/parish-finance-dashboards/
Our heritage

St Mary’s has been the centre of Christian worship in Taunton since 710 AD, first as a wooden Saxon church then rebuilt in stone and becoming a Parish Church in 1308.

The prosperous wool trade and a royal favour resulted in beautiful features being included such as the Tudor nave ceiling and the tower which at 163 feet is the tallest in Somerset and home to a young pair of breeding peregrine falcons.

In the 1840’s work was begun to restore the building: its galleries, pulpit and box pews were all removed and replaced. In 1862 the tower too was rebuilt although as an exact replica of the original.

In the 1980’s, the Upper Room and toilets were added and in the 90’s the Book and Gift and Coffee shops to serve visitors and locals alike. The beautiful Angel Doors were installed in 2008 to celebrate our 700th anniversary.

In 2017, after a successful fund-raising campaign, 15 new bells were installed, and its carillon chimes are a daily reminder to the town of the church’s position at its centre.

Current work involves renovation of the Father Willis organ which we anticipate will lead the choir and congregation once more in praise by Easter 2019.

St Mary Magdalene church is a place where we live our faith. Set in the centre of the town, we work to welcome all who come through our doors 7 days a week. Worship and prayer are at our heart.

“This Church is so beautiful because it is full of life”
Our worship and services

“Our past spirituality and prayerfulness gives us hope for the future and we build on that as we develop our vision”

The Sung Eucharist is at the heart of our life as a community, holding us together in our diversity. As we serve others we seek to be inclusive, looking to bring Christ into the world as an expression of His love. We do not judge, knowing that we all come to Christ as very different individuals with complicated lives. In God’s presence we are transformed into the people He is calling us to be.

A recent introduction of a BCP Sung Evensong at 4pm on the first Sunday of each month has become increasingly popular, attracting people from other churches. On occasions Evensong is followed by Benediction. Evensong is preceded at 3.30pm with afternoon tea and is an opportunity for fellowship.

Our Anglo Catholic tradition is reflected in the use of vestments, incense and lay servers within the context of traditional ceremony; and The Angelus is sung after the Sunday Eucharist during the Easter and Christmas seasons and also said at midday every Monday. It is accompanied by the ringing of the church bell which is a call to prayer and to spread goodwill to everyone on earth.

The ancient service of Candlemass is celebrated, a service of light and hope which honours the Light of the World and reminds us of the light within us.

Music is an important element in St. John’s tradition of worship. Although there is no choir, the congregation actively takes that role in the liturgy. The music is enhanced by the Father Willis organ, built in 1864 and rebuilt by Roger Yates in 1963, which is also used to support the numerous musical events taking advantage of the building’s splendid acoustic.

St John's is also regularly used for workshops and day courses by the R.S.C.M. and local Organist Associations.
St John’s Lunchtime Concerts help to forge links with the local community and local educational establishments. These free musical interludes are held from May to November and attract reasonable audiences. They are an established event in the Taunton social calendar.

A Lunchtime Carol Service, held at St John’s to mark the end of the season of lunchtime concerts, is designed to be accessible to all and especially for office workers from the local area. It has proved very popular, it is supported by a choir from County Hall and readers from the Courts and nearby offices.

Each November an Angel Tree Service is held for those who have experienced pregnancy or neo-natal loss, and in December the local St Margaret’s Hospice Light Up A Life service is hosted.

Annual retreat - Buckfast Abbey has become a regular backdrop for St John’s annual silent retreat led by Revd Jane Eastell. It is a time to let go and let God work within us. The 2018 Retreat was also offered to our benefice parish of St Mary’s.

Pause and ponder A recent development is a ‘place to pause and ponder’. It is designed to be used by people with faith or none. The ‘focus’ therefore is open and accessible and designed to have changing perspectives, allowing the individual to pause and ponder in the quiet and stillness of St John’s.

St John’s hosts the Holocaust Memorial Day. The anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz – Birkenau Nazi death camp is remembered with a short non-religious act of remembering. Candles are lit by representatives of various groups affected by the Holocaust. Survivors share personal stories, and local students share their experience of visiting Auschwitz and its effect on them.

As part of our developing links with URC and Temple Methodist, the three churches met during Lent 2018 to reflect on the book Holy Habits, giving opportunities to share in more depth our respective traditions. The course will continue in Advent.
Expressions of our faith

Charity Support
During 2017 (via our concert season):
Taunton Foodbank
The Chalice Well, Glastonbury
Taunton Festival of the Arts
St. Mary Magdalene's Church Organ Restoration Fund
St. John's Church, Church Emergency Organ Repair Fund
Stand Against Violence
BRACE - a SW Dementia Charity

We continue to support:
Christian Aid
Taunton Foodbank
Somerset Churches Trust
Taunton Christians Together

Christ, when he was lifted up did not say
"I draw some people to myself"
He said
"I draw all, all, ALL"
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Our finances and developments

The majority of the St John's membership use the Free Will Offering Scheme or Standing Order for regular giving. Income tax is reclaimed regularly to assist with the challenges involved with the upkeep and running of a Grade 1 Listed building. Personal giving is reviewed annually in October.

Commitment Sunday 2017 inspired increased giving and new commitments.

Our total disposable income in 2017 amounted to £31,014 out of which our Parish Share was £13,257. For 2018, a Benefice Ministry Allowance of £2,070 was allocated towards the £14,575 Parish Share leaving £12,505 for payment. We have always paid our Parish Share in full.

In 2016/17, following an appeal to the congregation and a grant awarded by the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Scheme, major roof repairs were completed. Essential organ repairs costing £6,500 were also carried out.

To date, grants have been awarded by the Big Lottery Fund, the Diocesan Fund for Church Growth and Garfield Weston to assist with re-ordering the church to provide kitchen and toilet facilities, and the removal of some of the rear pews will provide a much needed area to enjoy social events. This work is due to be completed Spring 2019. We are hesitant to make a further appeal to the congregation, already giving generously in money, time and talents, and for whom a further request is likely to be challenging. An unrestricted monetary gift has grown into a sizeable amount over 50 years. Known as the Barnett Bequest, invested and managed by the DBF, a small regular income from interest on the capital helps with day to day expenditure, the balance being available to help offset any future major expense.
Our heritage

In 1858 the Revd Frederick Jeremiah Smith began to build St John the Evangelist in the Tangier area of Taunton. Only the best was good enough for God, so the Revd Smith obtained the services of Sir George Gilbert Scott, one of the most eminent architects of the Victorian age, and a leader of the Victorian Gothic Revival Movement.

In 1863, St John’s was dedicated, and at the luncheon afterwards the Revd Smith announced that there would be no “pew rents” ignoring the class system of the time, and becoming the first Anglican church in Taunton where all pews would be available to all worshippers.

The first glimpse of the church, then as now, from all points, would have been the distinctive sandstone spire, which sits upon an eighty-foot tower. It is the only church in the town centre with a spire. Most of the church remains as its original design except for a few additions by eminent architects such as JD Sedding (Choirstalls and Lady Chapel Reredos), Henry Wilson (Screen) and John Dudley Forsyth (Baptistry).

St John the Evangelist is a place of sanctuary for all, including those of no faith, and offers an opportunity for silent prayer. We believe in Inclusive Church - church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality.

We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.

Encountering the God of Love, that all may be drawn to love.
Our place in the Town Community

Apart from our Benefice partnership with St John’s, **St Mary Magdalene** links with our Church of England sister church, St James, just 1/4 mile away. The link is through our young people’s group, Voice PC, which meets weekly. We are proposing to jointly develop this work, sharing the employment of a Youth and Family worker, once our Mission Hub development is underway.

A recent development suggests the potential for an additional link with our Mission Hub: Taunton Vineyard free church intend to locate a centre for community outreach very close by in Church Square. ‘B1’ is a weekly gathering for prayer and worship ‘of Christian leaders, united in recognition of unity in the Spirit and committed to the ministry of the gospel and the transformation of Taunton and surrounding area for the glory of God’. It is through this group of churches and fellowship groups that the relationship with Vineyard has grown at ministerial level, with acceptance of distinctiveness in worship but recognition of commonality in outreach to the town community.

The annual civic, cadets and veterans Remembrance service takes place at St Mary’s together with other occasional civic services including the Mayor’s Carol Service and services arranged by Somerset County Council. Taunton is also the home of 40 Commando Royal Marines for whom we have held services. Other charitable organisations hold carol services and concerts here, as well as major concerts featuring internationally known choirs and soloists.

St Mary’s is the custodian of the Soldiers’ Corner which records the service in particular of the Somerset Light Infantry (1685-1959), the Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry, the Light Infantry and, from 2007, the Rifles. From a rural county, Somerset raised a total of 17 Battalions in WW 1. The Book of Remembrance records the names of those who did not come home.

Once St Mary Magdalene is designated a minster church, discussions already held with Council Leaders suggest the formation of a Minster Council, a non-political body whose members would represent the religious, business, charity and civic sectors in the town centre for sharing experiences, successes and challenges, seeking ways forward on issues affecting the town centre community.
St John’s Church is a place of stillness and quiet. It is situated on the Western side of Taunton close to the law courts, County Hall, and many other administrative buildings.

It has a close link with Musgrove Park Hospital where the lead Chaplain is licensed as an Assistant Priest at St John’s. Musgrove Park is a 630+ bed District General Hospital with a busy Emergency Department. With around 4,000 staff it is the largest employer in the benefice. A number of members of each congregation volunteer at the hospital in a variety of roles.

Links with the United Reformed Church and Temple Methodist are being developed, as are links with County Hall.

“God bless the Church and Town”
Our place in the Diocese

As a Benefice we look forward to playing a full part in supporting the Deanery and Diocesan strategy by growing the Church, seeking the common good and re-imagining ministry.

St Mary Magdalene’s is asked from time to time to host Diocesan or Deanery originated activities. These include Archdeaconry days, Deanery Synod, The Big Sing and an annual Pilgrim Service for local Primary Schools.

In November 2015 the church received a letter from Taunton Deane Borough Council requesting the PCC “explore an application to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Peter Hancock, to look into the possibility of St Mary Magdalene changing its status to become a Minster [church]”. This suggestion from a different source some two years previously had been rejected unanimously by the PCC as we did not wish to be ‘different’ from our sister churches. However, this approach from Council leaders to the County Town civic church required closer and prayerful examination.

A small committee of PCC members took on this task involving research through referenced reading, visits and discussions with officers from urban minsters, local churches, business and community leaders, Archdeaconry and Deanery office-holders. We considered the potential impact on our civic relationship, the parish, Taunton Deanery, the benefice and, crucially, the mission and ministry of the church: would it aid delivery of our Mission Action Plan?

After some 18 months of work, the PCC overwhelmingly supported the proposition that an approach be made to our Diocesan Bishop that St Mary Magdalene be designated a Minster. Further consultations followed, and we are delighted that the Bishop has confirmed the designation will follow the institution of a new Vicar.

We are excited by the opportunity this will present to broaden the benefice’s mission and ministry within the town.

St John the Evangelist’s is respected as one of very few inclusive Anglo-catholic churches in the Diocese and plays a part in Diocesan strategy and events. The Assistant Priest is a clergy representative on Diocesan Synod and there are two lay representatives on Deanery Synod who report regularly at PCC meetings. Clergy attend Chapter meetings. We look forward to new opportunities for developing God’s mission in Taunton when St Mary’s becomes a Minster church.
From the Area Dean

The Deanery of Taunton covers 21 parishes across Taunton and the outlying villages. We are grouped into four Local Ministry Groups for more local support and working together. The Deanery also includes a number of chaplaincies at Musgrove Park Hospital, St Margaret’s Hospice, and some of the local primary and secondary schools. Taunton Town Chaplaincy also extends into shops and Railway Responders and we have Street Pastors in the town, and School Pastors at some of the schools.

Chapter meets together six times a year and we also have an annual quiet day and a lunch together once a year. Deanery Synod meets three times a year. We have recently reviewed the Deanery Mission Action Plan and a new full-time Pioneer Minister has recently been appointed who is based in the South Quantock Benefice working initially in the new housing estates in Monkton Heathfield, but his job description includes advising and supporting pioneer ministry across the Deanery. Other aspects of the plan include taking forward the Church of England report, Setting God’s People free and we are working to implement this in our Deanery. We have already run training courses locally and commissioned some new Lay Pastoral Assistants and Lay Worship Assistants.

Revd Rebecca Harris, Area Dean of Taunton Deanery

From the Archdeacon

Our vision: In response to God’s immense love for us we seek to be God’s people living and telling the story of Jesus.

Our vision speaks of the story of Jesus; his life, teaching and work, his death and resurrection; the story which is the context of our faith and the content of our message. We seek to live this story as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world and to tell it, both in sharing the good news and by the way in which our lives speak about Him.

The diocesan strategy is built around three priorities:

- To place mission and evangelism at the heart of all we do.
- To re-align our resources towards mission.
- To identify, develop and release the gifts of all our people.

The priorities provide a framework for decision-making and planning at parish, benefice, deanery, archdeaconry and diocesan levels.

The Ven Simon Hill, Archdeacon of Taunton
God of all love,
We give thanks for
St Mary Magdalene and
St John the Evangelist
working, praying and
worshipping together
as a Benefice.
We pray for continuing unity
and mission opportunities
as we seek to bring the light
and love of Christ
to our communities.
Amen