PARISH PROFILE

Benefice
of Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch
www.bhhw.org.uk/
Introduction from Bishop Rose

Thank you for taking an interest in the role of Rector of Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch. You’ll see from the rest of the profile some of the specific things that the benefice is looking for – and a little of what the team here hopes the future may look like. Of course, part of your discernment process in coming to this role is gaining a sense of the bigger picture of us as a diocesan family, our vision and priorities for the future.

Who we are

Founded in 597 by St Augustine, Canterbury Diocese is the oldest diocese in England and has a special place in the life of the national and worldwide Church. With its iconic Cathedral it forms a focal point for the life of the whole Anglican Communion, offering a spiritual home and place of pilgrimage for people from every nation and walk of life.

Kent is renowned as the ‘Garden of England’ and this rural heart is core to our identity - yet the communities we serve are very diverse. Our Diocese stretches from Maidstone to Thanet, from the Isle of Sheppey to the Romney Marsh. We have 350 miles of coastline with historic
ports and seaside resorts, alongside rural communities, market towns and commuter-belt urban developments. Affluent areas often sit alongside pockets of major deprivation, offering an exciting and challenging mission context.

Where we’re heading

At the heart of all we do is a vision of transformation for ourselves and our communities: no one can encounter God and remain unchanged. In our diocese, we want to increasingly become a Christian community transformed through our encounter with Christ, overflowing to transform and bless the families, homes and communities we serve in Kent:

Changed Lives → Changing Lives. In your role, in your place, we’ll be looking for you to play a crucial part in making this vision a reality.

Changed Lives → Changing Lives unites us in purpose but will be expressed in different ways according to what makes sense for different parts of our diocesan family. It’s also a living strategy – as we listen to God and one another, the shape of our work together will undoubtedly change and grow - you could help to develop this vision for the future. Find out more here or speak to the Ven Darren Miller, Archdeacon of Ashford on 01233 712649 or at darren.miller@archdeacashford.org

Our commitment to you

We know that supporting healthy, flourishing ministers (lay and ordained) is crucial for a healthy, flourishing diocese. That’s why we offer the ‘Canterbury Diet’ to all our incumbent ministers – this is an intentional programme for ministerial development, health, growth and faith. A lay programme is in development too. Additionally, we offer a range of specialised training events, as well as opportunities for growth in prayer and spirituality.

In short, I hope that you will be as excited by our vision, priorities and opportunities as we are. Be assured of our prayers as you consider your next step in ministry,

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin
Bishop of Dover and
Bishop in Canterbury
An Opportunity

In attractive rural Kent, the Benefice of Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch is looking to build for the future.

The Benefice consists of three compact but busy Parishes, each with an historic church having their own identity and style of worship. Together the churches serve a growing population of around 5,000 people, and run a packed calendar of events for the community from traditional church services to garden fetes, world-class classical concerts, and other fundraising activities.

Our Benefice is also part of a cluster of five churches with All Saints Church in Biddenden and St Michael the Archangel Church in Smarden.

We are seeking an incumbent with strong interpersonal and pastoral skills, to lead and develop ministry in the churches and in the community.

Our Benefice is looking to embrace and support a Rector who:

- Is a leader and inspires others with their own love of God and will enrich the spiritual life of our churches.
- Is a creative thinker and strategic planner who will further develop our churches’ community engagement and mission priorities.
- Is a creative liturgist who will honour traditional services whilst helping us to explore new ways of worshipping across the Benefice.
- Will embrace our communities and crucially be a visible presence in our villages and recognise and encourage the needs of the young.
- Is interested in people and has experience motivating people in their gifts and ministries.
- Is prepared to be ex-officio governor supporting our church schools.
Why Our Benefice?

The congregations across the Benefice are friendly, warm and welcoming with no pretentions. We are also fortunate to have an excellent organist (who travels between the churches, leading a small but enthusiastic choir) and a paid administrator who deals with enquiries, maintains communication between the parishes and supports the organisation of weddings, funeral and baptisms.

Our villages are vibrant and popular with many local businesses, primary schools and numerous community organisations.

We are home to a wide spectrum of people, from all kinds of backgrounds and we provide a unique opportunity for the right candidate to come and shape the future of our churches.

In line with the Diocese of Canterbury’s ‘Changed Lives → Changing Lives’ strategy, we have a vision of our churches growing numerically and spiritually, showing God’s love by performing a central role in our villages, building partnerships that enrich our communities, supporting people in their times of need and celebrating joyous occasions.

We just need the right leader to help us fulfill the dream!
Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch are located in East Kent, which boasts an impressive, varied landscape containing spectacular green spaces and countryside, as well as stunning coastlines. It's not hard to see why it's called the 'Garden of England'.

The Benefice is close to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with rolling hills, beautiful walks, stunning views, and plenty of countryside pubs and cafés. The wide stretch of sand at Camber has been described as one of Britain's best beaches.

Everywhere you go, there are historic buildings large and small. From Roman remains at Rye to the medieval city of Canterbury, the spiritual home of the Church of England, impressive architecture and museums abound.

Dover Castle, overlooking the famous white cliffs and country homes such as Leeds Castle, Sissinghurst and Scotney are all close by.
Amenities

The Local Amenities

Our Benefice gets the best of both worlds, from Ashford International Station you can be in the heart of London in just 35 minutes. Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam are also directly accessible via regular high speed Eurostar services. There are also excellent road connections.

Bethersden is 6 miles from the historic and picturesque market town of Tenterden, known as the Jewel in the Weald where there is a doctors surgery, Homewood Secondary School, swimming pool and leisure centre, golf course and an array of shops including Waitrose and Tesco, antique shops, charity shops and many independent shops.

Ashford town centre is just over 7 miles away where there are six secondary schools - The Towers School, Christchurch School, The North School, Highworth Grammar School, Norton Knatchbull Grammar School and Ashford School (a private school with two sites catering for nursery needs through to “A” Level).

Ashford also has a leisure centre with swimming pool, golf course, rugby club, football club, two cinemas, five supermarkets, a factory outlet centre, five fitness gyms, the Julie Rose Athletics Stadium, Conningbrook Leisure Lakes and numerous shops and businesses.

There are two hospitals nearby. The William Harvey Hospital in Willesborough is 10 miles from the Rectory and has many specialist departments including A&E. Benenden is a private hospital, which is 7 miles from the Rectory.
Bethersden has been a place for worship for about 1000 years. The current 14th century listed church has stained glass windows, nave and chancel. The ragstone building has been improved in recent years with a new kitchen, toilet, lighting and sound system. Passionate locals who care deeply for our historic church building run the charity, Friends of St Margaret’s. They organise several concerts and other fundraising events to raise money for the fabric of the building as we seek to continually improve and update.

As well as regular Eucharist services and family worship, there is an all-age service every month that is led by three members of the congregation. This service has been running for over a year and has attracted larger than usual congregations. It demonstrates that there is an interest in new styles of worship and an opportunity for growth in the village. Over recent years, a vibrant home group has been set up and led by a member of the congregation.

The church also hosts free afternoon teas twice a month.

Bethersden itself is a lively and beautiful village with 3 pubs, a post office/shop, an excellent butcher, hairdresser and beauty salon. There is an active tennis and cricket club, guide and scout groups, a Women’s Institute and several other well attended clubs, many of which take place in our Village Hall.

There are many committed christians in the village with a deep faith and passion for spreading the Gospel. We are praying that our new Rector can come to lead us, to love us, to comfort us and to work with us as we strive to follow Christ and show his love.
Background Information - All Saints Woodchurch

The Green has a fenced children’s play area and football club and is host to many village activities during the year - the school fete, school christmas fair, Woodchurch Morris Men, Kent Community Kite Flyers, and recently the start of a 10k run. In recent years a ‘Village Hub’ Information Centre has opened on The Green.

All Saints is a 13c grade 1 listed church. It houses several medieval artefacts and a unique medieval window.

Currently we have one 8am service, two Eucharist services, two Morning Worship and one Evensong per month. We also run a monthly Messy Church for all ages.

Woodchurch – or ‘the church in the wood’ – in its earliest days was a densely wooded area, which evolved into a farming community and is now partly farming and partly a ‘commuting village’ to London and surrounding towns.

The A28 to the north links Tenterden and Ashford and is approximately 2 miles away. A smaller road to the south of the village links Romney Marsh and Hamstreet to Tenterden.

Woodchurch currently has a population of just over 2,000. In the centre of the village is the large picturesque Village Green overlooked by the 120 year old white painted windmill.
One of the great successes was winning the South and South East Gold Medal for ‘Woodchurch in Bloom’ in only the second year of entering this competition.

A modern doctors’ surgery is to the south of the village, close by is Woodchurch House a residential home where All Saints holds a monthly communion service for both residents and visitors.

All Saints has very close links with a Church of England primary school which uses the church on a regular basis. A pre school is also on the school site. A number of parents attend the church on Fridays for a coffee and ‘bacon butties’ morning. A ‘Friends of Woodchurch Churchyard’ has been formed and a great transformation has already taken place in tidying up the graves.

The village has two pubs (standing next to each other and facing the church), a village store-sub post office, two garages, a butcher’s/farm shop and a model shop.

Numerous clubs and societies use the Village Hall and Annexe. The W.I., badminton club, over 60s club, the award winning Woodchurch Players, (who this year presented ‘Shakespeare’ and a young peoples excellent production of ‘Emma’), Woodchurch Art Group (which holds a popular yearly exhibition), Ashford Astrological Society, the Film Society, the Historical Society, the Gardening Society, plus monthly coffee mornings and various ‘one off’ bookings. At the rear of the Hall are tennis courts and the tennis club.

In Lower Road there are strong scout and guide groups, who meet in the Scout Hall, next to a recently built ‘Pop In’ centre which hosts regular activities during the week. Woodchurch also has an interesting ‘Village Life’ Museum.
A regular service pattern continues to be held in our church, the non-Eucharistic services have always been lay led and continue to be. A ‘Coffee and Croissants’ service is held every month - this is an informal service where a local charity is asked to speak and any funds raised are donated to the charity. Many local charities have benefitted from this service and awareness of their work has been raised. We also have family worship once a month, a shorter service that is more suited to families. While during the interregnum we are unable to hold a Wednesday 9.30am Eucharist, the attendees valued this chance to worship and so a lay led Matins is being held in its place. Bible study during Lent is well attended.

St. Mary’s in High Halden is an unusual Grade 1 listed 13th century church with a wooden tower. It has recently been fully renovated following a huge effort that included the whole community as well as specialist organisations. Set in glorious countryside the church is well loved and cared for by both its congregation and the wider community. Our members are involved in the Parish in many ways and we express our love for Christ through our love and care for our fellow villagers and the wider world. Church members run Brownies, the ‘Life is not an Xbox’ youth project and are active members of the village events committee.
We have a very organised team of volunteers who run the church day to day and support both the lay and ordained ministers in their calling to serve in our Parish. The Friends of St. Mary’s raise funds to help with the physical upkeep of the church and the PCC events committee raise funds to help towards ministry. The PCC runs a very well attended Gift Day every year that raises a substantial amount.

Looking to the future, our PCC has registered with the Eco Church programme and will be looking at ways in which we can look after God’s creation better and modify our use of resources to reflect our love for Him. This will also be an important part of encouraging new people to come into the church.

You may have heard of the angelic host that arrived in High Halden on the first day of advent last year; this secret project was started by church members and had a wonderful response from the village, the angels even made an appearance on the local BBC news. We are hoping to build on the success of this event in other creative ways to further improve our profile in the village. Plans are currently underway to hold a pet friendly service.

We value our links with our sister churches and the wide variety of opportunities to worship that we are blessed to be able to be part of. Our hopes for the future are to build on all the hard work already done, to further strengthen our links within the benefice and to find new and innovative ways to encourage church membership.
Open The Book

The proof of this success is that the children look forward to the next session and will often ask when that will be.

Only High Halden and Woodchurch are church schools, but Bethersden primary school has embraced the programme and achieved some incredible faith work as a result.

This amazing programme designed for schools by Bob Hartman has been a large part of the Benefice’s work with children.

Each Parish has a team of about four people who visit their respective schools on a fortnightly basis. The material used follows the church year with stories from the Old and New Testaments.

The children act out the stories with the adults leading the session. We have boxes of costumes and props that are shared between the three parishes.

Active engagement encourages the children to learn and remember Bible stories in a way that is understandable and fun.
The Rectory is located in Bull Lane within easy walking distance of St Margaret’s Church and Bethersden village centre. It is also well positioned for travel via the A28 to Woodchurch and High Halden, making it an excellent ‘headquarters’ for the Benefice as a whole.

The Rectory is a well laid out, spacious, detached family home with two reception rooms, a study, four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a well equipped kitchen. The space can be used flexibly to provide separate areas for work, entertaining and relaxing.

Outside, there is a good sized, mature garden surrounded by trees and hedges making it both secure and private with plenty of space to enjoy the beautiful Kent weather. There is also a small garage and lots of room for parking.

The building has been well maintained and cared for over the years and is ready to move into just as soon as our new incumbent arrives.
# The Benefice and its Future

## Our Strengths
- PCCs that are representative of each of the parishes
- Strong teams of volunteers that help with organisation
- Willingness to change and explore new ways to worship
- Strong educational work and links with each of the parish primary schools
- Events that attract audiences from across the parishes and beyond
- Strong communication between the parishes and the sharing of ideas and best practice
- Vibrant charities raising money for the fabric of the churches

## Our Opportunities
- Scope for change and exploration of faith within all congregations
- Expand on community use in all churches
- Attracting families and children into the churches especially as new housing developments come on stream

## Our Weaknesses
- Insufficient cross-fertilisation of services across the Benefice
- Understanding the needs of the parishes
- Insufficient communication network for pastoral support
- Gap in funding for the maintenance and upgrade of the church buildings and infrastructure

## Our Threats
- The general trend of diminishing congregations across rural areas