



Vicar

Ascension Church, Bitterne Park Benefice

In the deanery of Southampton



Index

Title	Page
Welcome	3
Introduction	4
Our Vision	5
Our Church Life	6
Our Team	10
Our Organisation	12
The House	14
Role Description	15
Appendix	17



Welcome

Welcome to this parish profile and welcome to the Diocese of Winchester.

At the heart of our life here is a desire to be always Living the Mission of Jesus. We are engaged in a strategic process to deliver a mission-shaped Diocese, in which parochial, pastoral, and new forms of pioneering and radical ministry all flourish. Infused with God's missionary Spirit we want three-character traits to be clearly visible in how we live:

- Passionate personal spirituality
- Pioneering faith communities
- Prophetic global citizens

The Diocese of Winchester is an exciting place to be now. We wait with eager anticipation to see how this process will unfold. We pray that, if God is calling you to join us in his mission in this part of the world, he will make his will abundantly clear to you.

'As the Father sent me so I send you ... Receive the Spirit.'
John 20:21

Read more about [Winchester Mission Action Planning](#).



Tim Dakin
Bishop of Winchester



Debbie Sellin
Bishop of Southampton

Introduction

Ascension is a growing church in Bitterne Park Parish and forms part of the Deanery of Southampton, with a lively Chapter of Clergy and Deanery Synod, and is in the Diocese of Winchester.

Our parish is on the eastern side of Southampton, and covers four main areas, Bitterne Manor, Midanbury, Bitterne Park and part of Townhill Park. These areas have very distinct characteristics, and in the parish you will find a wide range of ages, housing types, and socio-economic groups.



The main centres of the wider parish are the small shopping districts, the health centre, the river and parks, the primary schools and a highly-ranked secondary school. The quality of the schools has seen the type of people living in the area change in recent years, with young families in particular moving to Midanbury and Bitterne Park. The area is also attracting more young professionals as more flats are built. Additionally, there is also a 1960s estate on the edge of the parish at Townhill Park which is currently being re-modelled. This has pockets of deprivation, and no faith building nearby.

The parish is close to both the M3 and M27, the University and the city centre. There is also an international airport with good rail-links to London and the South West of England. The New Forest is nearby, as is the coast with access to sailing and water sports.



Our Vision

At Ascension, we have taken some time to discern clearly what kind of a church we are. We want to state this upfront, so we can own it, and take steps to go deeper in becoming and expressing it. Our Mission Mandate lays out what we are here for, and our values outline what we need to keep on the agenda and focus on if we are to accomplish our mission.

Mission Mandate

Inviting those around us to encounter the living Jesus and be transformed to a life captivated by him.

Our Values

Jesus is the definition

We look at Jesus to see fully who God is, what it means to be human and how it looks to be fully alive.

Prophetic interruption

We expect that the Holy Spirit will interrupt our plans, as he leads us as a community. We make space to respond to this as we follow him together.

Empowering vocation

We are committed to helping people discover who Jesus has made them to be and empowering them to play their role in his rescue plan for creation.

Jesus encounter

We expect to encounter Jesus as present with us and to be changed through this. We intentionally shape our gatherings to make space for this.

Dependant prayer

We seek to engage deeper and more often in prayer, only with this foundation will we see the impossible happen and lives be transformed by Jesus.



Our Church Life

Worship, Fellowship, and Prayer

One of the main ways that we worship at Ascension is our two Sunday services, the 9:00 and the 10:45. Our 9:00 service is a more traditional service of Holy Communion using common worship, with hymns, reflective space, a short sermon, and occasionally Taizé worship or Lectio Divina. The 10:45 service is our contemporary service, with an extended time of sung worship, a longer sermon, space to respond to the Holy Spirit and a more informal overall feel.



Advent, Christmas and Easter are given a large emphasis, with a host of services or activities often focussed on reaching those in our wider community, such as Carol and Crib services, reflective prayer spaces, midnight Communion, a Maundy Thursday meal ([see video](#)), a dawn service, and services for local schools.

On Tuesday mornings, the staff team lead an informal prayer meeting, which is currently held online. The period between Ascension and Pentecost brings a focus on prayer, with 24/7 prayer in the building, quiet days, and guided prayer weeks.

Small Groups

Small Groups grew significantly during 2020 bringing people together who previously may not have been in a small group or part of the Ascension church family. Our small groups reflect the breadth of our church community, with different models, times, and expressions to aid accessibility and engagement. All of our groups are non-prescriptive, allowing freedom to engage with whatever is most appropriate for them.

Students

The student community is growing at Ascension where we help to equip students to know and share Jesus. We meet on Wednesday evenings to worship, pray, study the Bible, share testimonies, and encourage one another in mission. We have plenty of socials throughout the year along with a weekend away and meals throughout October for new students.

Children, Youth Work, and Schools

The youth and children's work are at the centre of our church family. Our children's work (in-person and online) aims to connect and bring life, fun, and excitement to how we express Jesus within our parish. There is a regular attendance of over 30 children, and it is highly regarded within the wider church. There is a drop-in for young people from the local secondary school with over 30 teens. Our Church discipleship group has grown to over 18 young people, who continue to reach out to friends, contributing to the ongoing growth of the church. Furthermore, we have established relationships with local schools who regularly invite us to share our faith, e.g. through church visit days.



Outreach Activities

At Ascension, mission is an integral part of everything we do as we strive to be an outward looking community that provides the opportunity to encounter Jesus and be transformed. We are actively involved in outreach activities in Townhill Park, one of Southampton's more deprived estates. Ruth Hills is our Church Army Pioneer Evangelist working across the parish, with a particular call to Townhill Park.

We have initiated various activities that focus on bringing the community together and enabling them to meet with Jesus. These include:

- A parents and toddler group (Footsteps), with a regular attendance of 25 children and parents and an after-school club (EDGE), which attracts over 35 children as well as their family members.
- On October 31st we provide "Light in the Night" activities for local families as an outreach event.
- We run Alpha a couple of times a year in the church building, with meals provided by the church community.
- We host a clothing bank run by Southampton City Mission with church and community volunteers. We also collect donations for them for their city-wide Food Banks.
- The Church Café is open Tuesday and Wednesday mornings and is staffed by volunteers for anyone in the community for refreshments and a time to talk. The worship space is open for prayer and reflection during the Café's opening hours. The church is exploring the possibility of the café becoming a social enterprise in the future.
- Running Group: #RunAndTalk is the weekly 5km community social run with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, supported by trained mental health first aiders. We are developing more of these activities targeted to specific groups within our community such as youth, Townhill and schools.
- The Art Group is an all-ability community group run by members of the church twice a week. They offer an opportunity for creative expression and tuition with time to talk and pray.



Vocations, Ordinands, and Ministry Experience Scheme

Ascension has a strong desire to see everyone reach their full potential in God in whatever way he maybe calling them in his service. Ascension has been blessed through its engagement with the Ministry Experience Scheme (MES previously CEMES) helping young people to discover God's calling on their lives. Our focus on ministry development, calling and enabling gifting has borne fruit in the number of Ordinands we have sent into training.

Social

We aim to organise several events throughout the year to reflect the seasons and the church calendar. These events are very much linked with our vision for mission: *Inviting those around us to encounter the living Jesus and be transformed to a life captivated by him.* At each event we are building relationships, introducing Jesus and showing his love. We aim to ensure that all our social activities are open to the wider community, by personal invitation and online/social media/poster publicity. Some examples include:

- A Christmas 'ball' with a meal and quiz
- A summer BBQ/hog roast with live music
- Blaze Night in November with bonfire and barn dance
- Quiz and chips suppers
- Baked Potato Sundays – church family lunch
- Fun days at Townhill Park



Links with Uganda

Ascension has links with the church in Naminage, in Busoga Diocese, Uganda. Members of our community have visited several times over many years, and we have hosted visitors from theirs. We pray and support the church financially and practically and have a mutually encouraging relationship.

Worship & Fellowship during COVID-19

Due to the lock-down restrictions in 2020 all churches were required to cease public worship. During this period the corporate worshipping life of Ascension was transitioned online by meeting together in small groups. The rationale behind this was to attempt to preserve the worshipping life of our congregations whilst simultaneously allowing authentic community to flourish. It was our belief that small groups, led by staff members, in which every person present would be able to actively participate would enable us to meet these two aims.

During the first two weeks of not meeting, the staff team invited every member of our congregation to be part of a small group during lock-down. We were able to allocate around 95% (150 people) of our congregation to various small groups. These groups were staff led and contained between 8 and 15 members. They followed a teaching programme to maintain some sense of continuity among the groups. In this way prayer, worship, teaching, confession, scripture reading, children's and youth work, and outreach were able to be maintained.

We have felt that small groups have been successful in allowing us to continue worshipping together in this time. They allowed church members to actively participate in meetings and proved to be manageable for staff team. So, these groups continued when church started to open again in the summer, and during the 2nd and 3rd lockdown. As church re-opened, we introduced online streaming services which allowed those who were unable to attend in person to still be part of the worship. The 9:00 service moved to Zoom to enable those not on computers to participate via landline telephones, and the 10:45 broadcast to our YouTube channel.

Useful Links

- Church Website: <https://www.ascensionsouthampton.co.uk>
- Video tour of the church: <https://youtu.be/ncp2OAvI5vA>
- UK Blessing signed by Ascension Kids and Youth: <https://youtu.be/reb2LjE2trU>
- YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD-fmKB1y2TEbgxHNtyND2Q>
- SoundCloud Channel for sermon recordings: <https://soundcloud.com/ascensionsouthampton>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ascensionsoton>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ascensionsoton/>

Staff Team

What we do and why we do it?



Pete Goodall – Curate

As the Assistant Curate at Ascension my role is various and wide. Like others in the team I both lead and preach across all services. I have shared oversight for the 'Small Groups'. I provide support and direction in reaching out to our wider communities. I do this, simply because God has called me to proclaim Jesus.



Lorna Allez – 2nd year Ordinand

I'm involved with the shared leadership of the mission and ministry at Ascension, also looking after our students, our communications, our periodic vocational courses and our Sunday live-streaming. I do these as I'm passionate about seeing others grow in their love for Jesus, and see them inviting friends to do the same!



Marc Allez – Final year Ordinand (Curate from Summer 2021)

I share responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church, including Sunday leading and preaching, looking after our hospitality and AV teams, and am jointly responsible for our small group ministry, and planning sermon series. I do this as I'm passionate about seeing the body of Christ being built up and seeing the love of Jesus poured out into our community.



Lauren Cheshire – Final year Ordinand (until July 2021)

I am part of the leadership team, preaching and leading. I help with the children and youth work and support the work happening in Townhill. I have run the Alpha Courses and developed a team for the future. The Church is the family of God and all are welcome; I am part of a team that loves to tell people about Jesus and invites them to be a part of our family.



Ann Devereux – 1st year Ordinand

I am a first year Ordinand training at the Winchester School of Mission currently on placement. I co-lead a Ladies Hub support group and am part of the hospitality team. I love being part of the community at Ascension and whilst our Ladies Hub is still supporting each other, I am looking forward to getting back into church in order to 'officially mingle'.



Ruth Hills - Pioneer Evangelist

I work in the local area, sharing the wonderful news of Jesus' love to as many as possible, through as many means as possible, that they might know his love and grace for themselves, and become part of the Ascension body of Christ. God has anointed me as an evangelist and I am therefore compelled to speak of him, for his glory.



Jo Szedlak - Children and Families Worker

I'm responsible for organising and delivering the kids and youth work and am excited by how God has continued to move and grow this work despite lockdown. I run a youth discipleship group and youth drop-in at the local secondary school as well as pastoral work with families and other local schools. I do it because I am passionate about seeing kids and young people grow in their relationship with God, with each other and in who God has created them to be.



Isobel White - Administrator

Together with the Parish Clerk, Frances Samphire, and volunteers we support the ministry team and PCC as well as manage the Centre's room bookings. I do this for the variety of the role, the joy of the team, the excitement in the growth of faith, congregations and community engagement, the liveliness of the building (when it's not affected by COVID). It's exciting, challenging and rewarding.

Support Team

Andy Gordon - Church Warden

Frances Samphire - Parish Clerk and Electoral Roll Officer

Jenny Hewitt - Licensed Lay Minister PTO

Megan Bailey - Parish DBS Admin & Safeguarding Officer

Tim Nutt - Treasurer

Kim Wherry - Gift Aid Officer

Sara Whitmarsh - Licensed Lay Minister

Ben Parkin & Sam Nichols - Deanery Synod Rep

Our Organisation

Governance is provided by the PCC which aims to meet 6 times a year. We have a united, diverse, committed and dynamic PCC who are keen to see our mission played out in our community and the City of Southampton through cross church initiatives. They have responsibilities for co-operating with the incumbent and wider team in promoting the whole mission of the Church; pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. In doing so they endeavour to join and liaise with other churches in the Deanery to promote the wider Church mission. As well as general maintenance responsibility for the Church building which also incorporates a café, the PCC has responsibility for a garden of remembrance and a property, currently rented to two of our Ordinands.

We have been blessed with a large team of Ordinands and a Curate, as well as a Church Army Pioneer Evangelist whose role includes working with deprived areas of our parish (e.g. Townhill Park). We also employ a Children & Families worker and a Parish Administrator. This means we can have teams headed by members of the Ascension staff team for worship, discipleship, evangelism, small groups, Alpha, students, youth & children, and older persons ministry. We have several groups that engage with the local community and serve diverse needs, these include Ascension Running Community as well as the art group.

As of end-2020 there were 107 members on the Electoral Roll. This number has been growing in recent years. The average weekly attendance pre-COVID was 26 at the 9:00am service and 98 at the 10:45am. During the lockdowns we have had on average 22 joining the 9am service online and 55 households connecting with 10:45am YouTube streamed service. With the building being closed for so much of 2020 there was disruption to the usual number of life event services. Typically, we might anticipate 4 baptisms, 1 wedding and 3 or 4 funerals each year.

Finance Summary

The finances of Bitterne Park parish are in a very healthy position. The annual budget is set by the Finance committee and approved by the PCC and our budget ensures good stewardship of our income.

Income

We are very fortunate to have over 40 regular givers through Parish Giving Scheme, Standing Order, and Online giving. Other income comes from Hall hiring (although this has been reduced due to COVID-19), dividends from our investments, and letting the 3 bedroom house we own in the parish. The café income and expenditure are separately accounted for, with a contribution being made towards utilities costs each year. The café is not permitted to make a profit, so all the money is ploughed back into the running of the café.

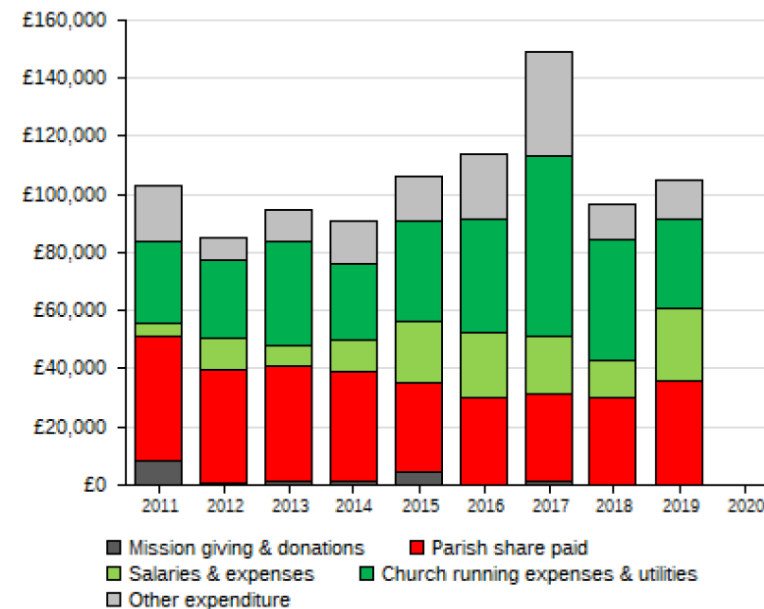
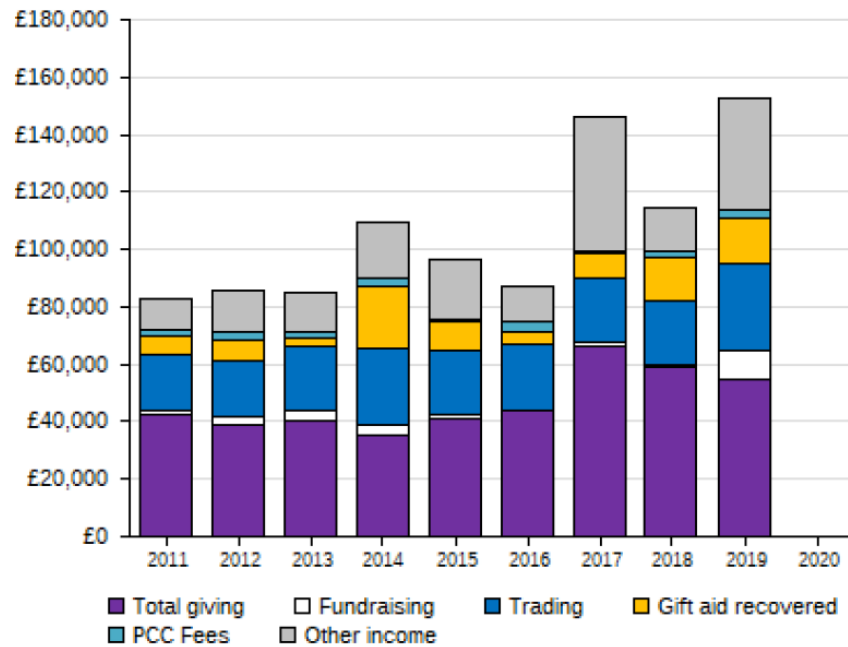
Expenditure

The expenditure is made up of general church running costs, salaries for the Children & Youth worker and Parish Administrator, church maintenance, and clergy expenses which are reimbursed in full. The Common Mission Fund contribution is paid in full each year.

Investments

The church has been blessed with a substantial legacy in 2020 from the sale of a house and we will be looking at how we use some of this money over the next few years.

Income and Expenditure Breakdown

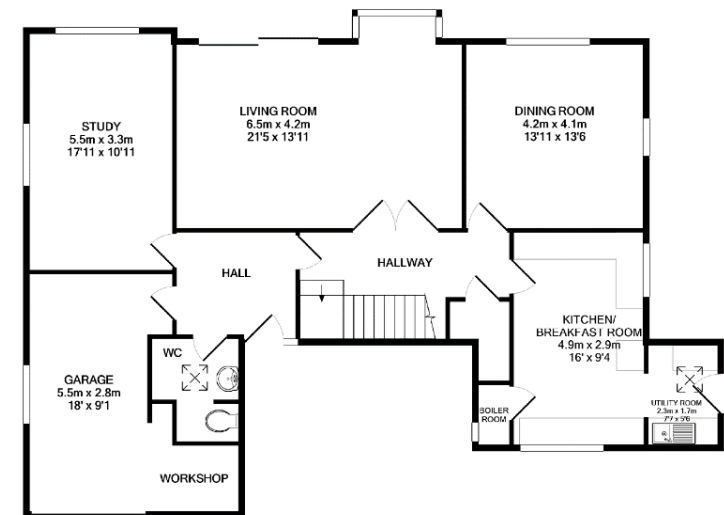
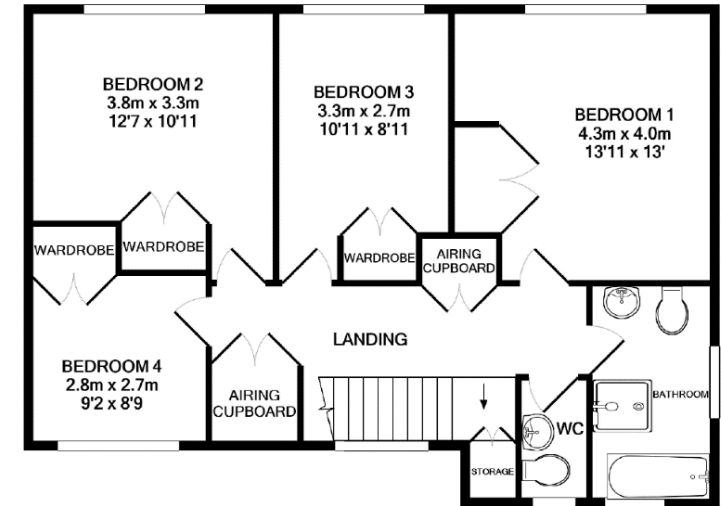


The House

The Vicarage is a spacious detached 4 bedroom family home with a delightful garden. It is situated in a quiet cul-de-sac around the corner from the church building, just a few minutes' walk from the main road and a Tesco's Express. It is also a short walk to the Triangle and its takeaways and other local shops and onto Riverside Park. There is a good selection of Primary and Secondary Schools in the area. Unusually, Bitterne Park secondary school also has a 6th form college.

The property has 3 good sized reception rooms with the sitting room leading on to the garden. There is a large newly fitted kitchen with space for appliances and a utility room. Upstairs there are 4 double bedrooms and a family bathroom with separate toilet. There is a large garden which is mainly laid to lawn and a patio off the sitting room. To the front of the property there is a garage and large driveway with space for a number of cars.

The property has the benefit of full gas-fired central heating; recently installed UPVC double-glazed windows and mains drains and electricity.



Role Description

Spirituality

- Is sustained by their ordered devotional life of study, prayer, scriptural reflection, and Christian fellowship.
- Experiences conscious dependence upon God and the empowering of God's love and spiritual gifts as a daily aspect of their own life, and eagerly desires that same filling by the Holy Spirit for all God's people.
- Seeks to follow the model given to us, by Jesus Christ, of active ministry and time out for reflection and prayer in quiet days and retreats.
- Displays wisdom and sustainability in balancing the needs of ministry with commitment to their own family and friends.

Worship & Preaching

- Comfortable to support diversity in worship and will lead in different styles and contexts with confidence, creativity, and warmth.
- Preaches with clarity and accessibility in ways that inspire and engage with contemporary life and its challenges.
- Welcomes, develops, and releases the gifts of others in the leading of worship, e.g. LLMs, retired clergy, lay people, youth and children's ministers, and worship leaders.

Leadership & Collaboration

- Brings a transformative and empowering leadership style, and in seeking God can communicate clearly both strategic vision and the practical requirements of day-to-day parish life.
- Has a heart to develop and release indigenous leadership across all parts of church life.
- In setting goals and managing expectations has a realistic awareness of their own and others' limitations.

Discipleship, Learning and Nurture

- Is open and creative in their approach to Christian discipleship and spiritual growth, strongly committed to seeing God's people, of all ages, grow and mature in faith and use their gifts in God's service.
- Will share their own knowledge, experience, and gifts with others; be tactful and respectful when challenging others, and open to such challenge themselves.

Evangelism & Engagement with Social Justice

- Is proactive and persuasive in sharing the good news of Jesus and is committed to helping others to discover who Jesus has made them to be, releasing and empowering them to play their part in his rescue plan.
- Through creativity and innovation looks to create a culture of openness and welcome, that reaches out to the marginalised, disaffected, and unchurched in our community and the city.
- Demonstrates a strong heart and understanding for social justice, inspiring, and releasing the church community to respond to injustice.
- Has a passion for increasing the reach of the church (e.g. into Townhill Park) and understanding the challenges that it can bring.
- Is experienced in working with schools and is committed to developing relationships with local schools and young people beyond schools.

Pastoral Care

- Is approachable and sensitive to the varied pastoral needs of our church family and the wider community.
- Sees pastoral care as having an important role in the spiritual and emotional well-being of the church family and the wider community.
- Leads the church in enabling clergy and lay people to exercise their own pastoral gifts within the church family.

Stewardship & Parish Organisation

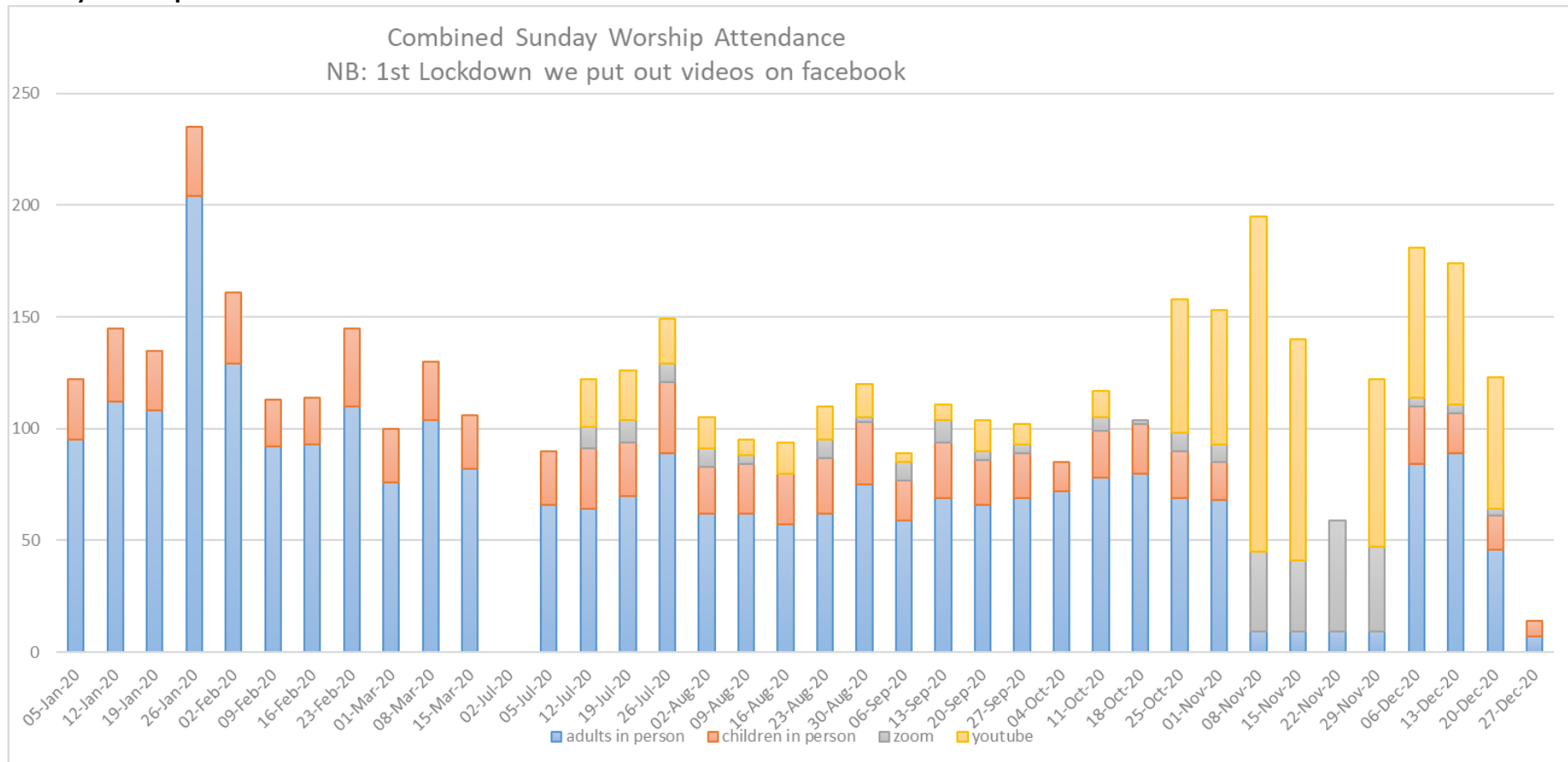
- Exhibits and encourages generosity in the discipleship of church members, in the giving of their time, talents and money.
- Has the ability to plan, organise, manage, and chair meetings with effective communication with the staff team, and PCC.
- Exercises effective management of staff team and volunteers and is able to delegate tasks within the team.

Ecumenism & Links with Other Bodies

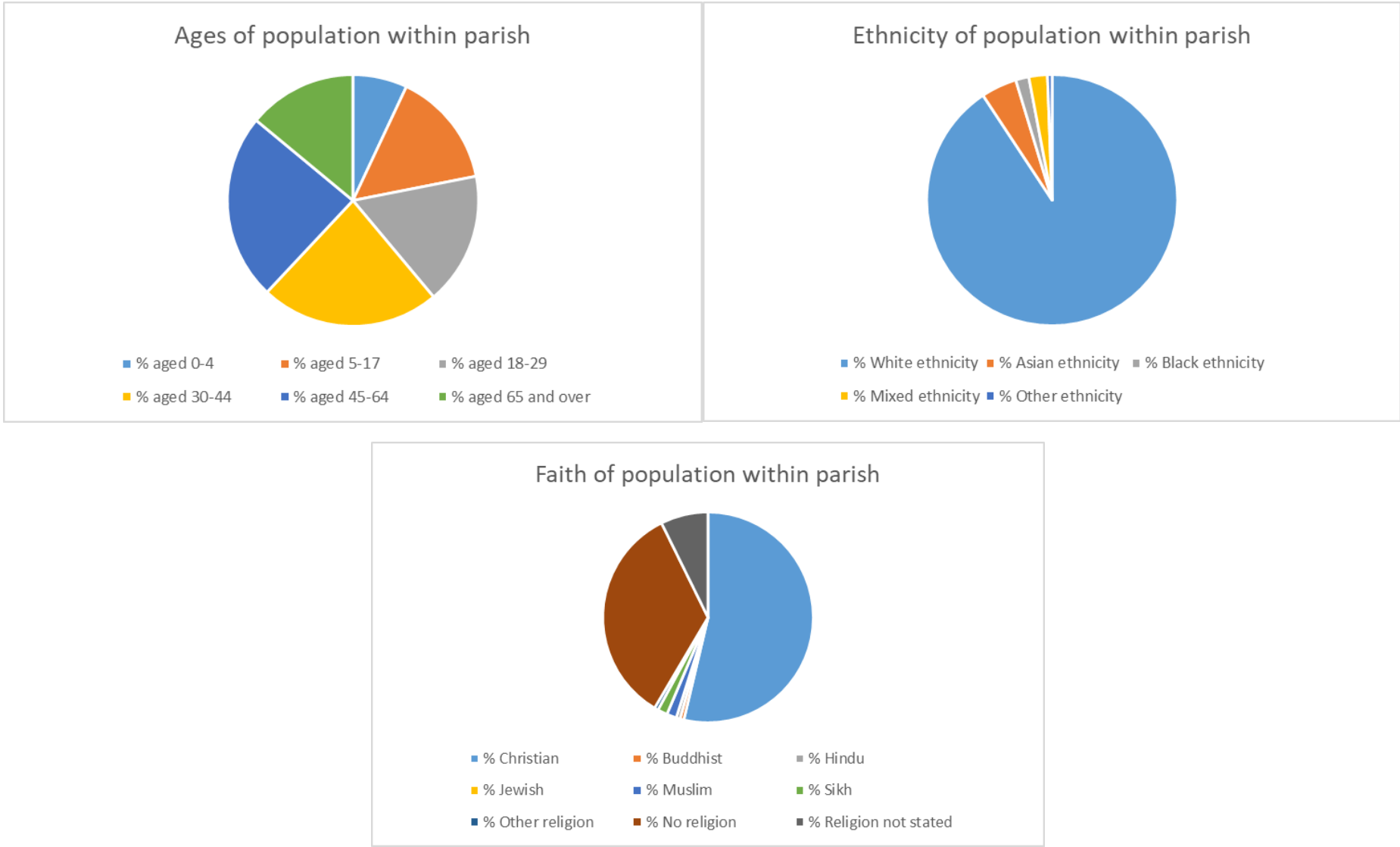
- Builds on existing ecumenical links within the parish and the city:
 - Love Southampton, and Southampton Christian Network
 - Bitterne Park Church Leaders Forum
 - Southampton House of Prayer (SOHOP)
- Demonstrates an active encouragement and engagement with our overseas mission links in Uganda.
- Plays an active part in Deanery, through both the Chapter and synod and in the life of the Diocese.

Appendix

Sunday Worship Attendance 2020



Parish Statistics



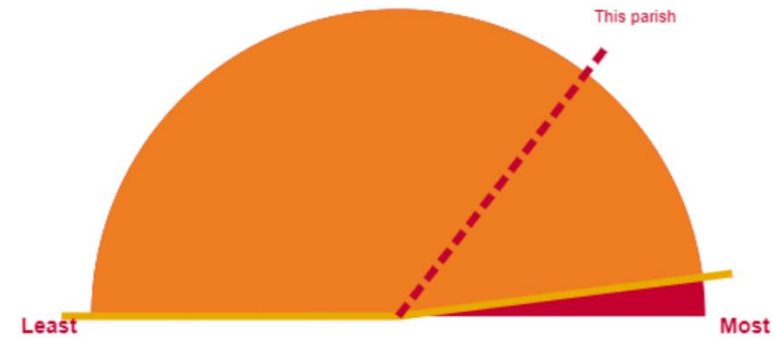
Overall Parish Deprivation

The population of Bitterne Park Parish is 15,115. It ranks 3596 out of 12,382, where 1 is the most deprived parish.

This means that the parish is relatively deprived compared with other parishes in the country.

Find out more detail here at Church Urban Fund website:

<https://cuf.org.uk/parish/410309>



Other Information

We are a polling station for two electoral wards which is a fantastic community awareness of the church, with over 700 people through our doors for both the EU and 2020 Elections.

The 12 church bells in the Ascension church tower are rung once every 3 weeks as the team (Southampton Guild of Church Ringers) rotate between 3 churches. In 2008 when the last 4 bells were installed, they were said to be the lightest set of 12 bells in the world!

Other Links to local area:

Bitterne Park and Townhill: <http://bitternepark.info>

Riverside Pre-school: <http://riversidepreschool.co.uk/>

Bitterne Park Primary school: <https://www.bppsive.net/>

Bitterne Park Secondary school: <https://www.bitterneparkschool.org.uk/>

Sixth form college <https://www.bitterneparksixthform.org.uk>