



# CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION STIRCHLEY

## PARISH PROFILE 2024

Open, Generous, Faithful

As a congregation, this is who we are and who we would like to be.

As a church, we seek to be like the trees in our garden - fruitful, sheltering and growing.

As part of our Transforming Church Action Plan we have identified three areas of focus:

- Growing relationships with young people and families
- Growing as a local, accessible Christian community
- Developing our land and buildings to reflect who we are and what we want to be.

These are standing items on our PCC agendas.

## The Priest we would like to Welcome

He/she should:

- Have a prayerful desire to lead an open, generous and faithful Church
- Be sensitive to and supportive of our inclusive and liberal Anglo Catholic traditions
- Take forward the mission of the Ascension to the community
- Be willing to tackle tough issues and make difficult decisions
- Be a good communicator and have good people skills
- Work constructively and productively with the PCC, Churchwardens, Ministry Team, Youth and Families Worker and others in the congregation and parish
- Recognise and develop the many gifts and talents of the laity
- Have a strong commitment to pastoral care
- Form strong partnerships with the other churches in our Oversight Area, Riverside Church and other local churches
- Have good IT skills.

## What we can offer

- A welcoming, friendly and supportive Church fellowship
- A congregation with many gifts and talents
- A diverse parish with many opportunities for mission and outreach
- A beautiful Church and well maintained hall
- An attractive garden with large trees and seating
- A modern vicarage separate but adjacent to the Church.

**“A church with a love for the  
local community, opening up arms  
to them, reaching out and bringing  
Jesus’ love to them”**

## Our Parish

We are an inner Birmingham suburb of distinctive and changing character with much potential and great opportunity. We have 6,600 residents, increasingly mixed in story, faith and age. The Parish lies along the main A441 Pershore Road and the Worcester-Birmingham Canal. Bournville Station provides frequent trains to Birmingham centre. A new station is due to open in 2025 at Pineapple Road. There are frequent bus services and access to the wide variety of the city's cultural, spiritual and sporting life. Cannon Hill and Highbury Parks are close by as are many other local green spaces, cycle trails and heritage paths.

Stirchley's housing comprises largely Victorian and Edwardian terraces and 1920s/30s, originally local authority estates. Stirchley is now a place in demand due to its affordable housing and employment opportunities, with renewal of craft eating, brewing, and specialist repair outlets alongside traditional building and decorating suppliers. ("This is where people come to have things mended" - City Council.) Newcomers include staff at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, (10 minutes by train), students and the self-employed. Stirchley however remains a place of support for asylum seekers and for the hardest-pressed of every age.

Morrisons opened in 2020 and Aldi in 2022. Lidl is due to open in early 2025 alongside a further housing development led by three Stirchley co-operatives, Loaf bakery, Birmingham Bike Factory and Artefact Cafe and Arts Project. In 2016 the former Stirchley Baths were reopened as Stirchley Community Hub. This has been a major source of support for community life and of our active declaration of being a dementia-friendly community, supported by the Leaf Project which itself has many church related partners.

Stirchley also has a long-established Public Library, a Community Forum, History Society and active environmental groups. We have an excellent Primary School and others close by. All, including the police, are under very large pressure from the City Council's current financial stresses. We work closely together with our local councillor and others to support those at most risk. Although our Sunday congregation is not large, Ascension has a strong place in local life, and especially in youth work.

There is much to look forward to.





## Our Church

The Church of the Ascension is part of the Diocese of Birmingham within the Church of England. The foundation stone of the first Church was laid in 1898 on a site in Hazelwell Street. A daughter church dedicated to St Hugh of Lincoln was established on the Pineapple Estate in 1927. In 1965 the Church of the Ascension was severely damaged by fire and subsequently demolished. However, some artefacts including stained glass, stations of the cross, altar silver, vestments and processional crosses were salvaged and are used in the present church. The new Church of the Ascension was designed by Romilly Craze and built in Pineapple Grove adjacent to St Hugh's and consecrated by the Bishop of Birmingham on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1973. The Church of St Hugh then became the Church Hall.

“A church with potential in a growing and rapidly changing parish”



## Our Buildings

The Church buildings in Pineapple Grove are set back behind a large grassed area fronted by Pineapple Road. Pineapple Grove is in the middle of a large estate with mixed Council and owner-occupied properties.

The Church is a modern octagonal design with an organ loft above the main entrance and an ambulatory round five sides. There is a magnificent stained-glass window depicting the Ascension of Christ opposite the entrance. The high altar is in a raised sanctuary surrounded by a rail on three sides. Chairs are upholstered. There is a Lady Chapel off the main worship area (right) which is also used for PCC and other meetings. There is ramp access for pushchairs and wheelchairs. There is a children's corner with a Noah's Ark, equipped with cushions and toys. There is a vestry and office, a small kitchen off the Church, a toilet for disabled people and three unisex toilets. We have plans to improve access to the Church when funds are available.



The Church Hall has a kitchen attached with a serving hatch to the main Hall. In addition to storage areas there is a small meeting room currently used for Little Pineapples equipment. The Hall is due to be refurbished. Its attractiveness as a hire venue has been considerably improved in recent years. It is used for Little Pineapples and Place of Welcome. The hall is used by a number of groups on a regular basis and also for ad hoc events. Hall hire makes a big contribution to our finances.

There is a spacious garden with large oak and ash trees with access from the Hall. It is used for Little Pineapples and occasionally for services.



## The Vicarage

The Vicarage is situated behind the Church. It is a single storey L-shaped building built in 1993 and approached by a separate driveway. The house is centrally heated with four bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge, study and a double garage. There is a full range of schools locally with Birmingham University and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital close by.

## Local Churches

The Ascension is part of the Kings Norton, Moseley and Shirley Deanery and belongs to an Oversight Area of 6 local churches (St Francis, Bournville, St Bedes Brandwood, All Saints Kings Heath, Cotteridge Church and Hazelwell Church). Canon Richard Wharton, Vicar of Bournville, has been appointed as Oversight Minister. We are members of Churches Together in B30, an ecumenical group of local churches which organises the World Day of Prayer in March. Other local churches include St Andrews Methodist Church and the Stirchley Community Church. We have a very close relationship with the local Riverside Church, collaborating on outreach activities for many years.

## Our Congregation

The congregation is currently about 24 strong with approximately 50% living in the Parish. The group is capable of singing unaccompanied, and although small in number, is highly committed and keen to play an active part.

The Ministry Team consists of the Youth and Families Worker, Ellie Dattani, two Readers with PTO, Anne Waugh and Dr David Veale, and also the generous support of two retired and experienced priests, Fr Brian Hall and Fr Rob Morris, who are both honorary Canons at the Cathedral. The Team meets several times a year.



## Our Worship

Our main service is on Sundays at 10.15 and is a Eucharist in the Anglo Catholic tradition. It is normally held in the Church but occasionally in the hall when it is very cold, or even outside in the garden on special occasions! A weekday Mass is said monthly in St Hugh's Chapel. There is considerable lay participation with servers, readers, people leading the intercessions and administering the chalice with one of the Readers or the Sacristan usually assisting the presiding Priest. Currently we are not normally using the High Altar in consideration of our older congregational members. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in

Church, Holy Water stoups are provided near the main entrance and Votive candles are available. There is an organ (although it is in need of maintenance) and a keyboard in the body of the Church. Alternatively music can be streamed over speakers into the Church or Church Hall.



**“Doing amazing work in the community  
and local schools with a small but  
committed team”**

We are currently experimenting with a Muddy Church activity on a monthly basis and also hold a well-attended community lunch on the same Sunday (left). We do not have a Sunday School during the service, but in the past the vicar has prepared an activity and if not preaching, spent time with any school-aged child present.

We have prayers on Zoom on Tuesday and Thursday mornings using the CofE service of Contemporary Daily Prayer.

We celebrate special occasions such as Ascension Day with a Sung Mass and we also hold a Maundy Thursday ceremony. Other special services include an All Souls Service, a Family Easter Service and a Christingle Service. A Requiem Mass may be sung following the death of a regular member of the congregation.

We hold discipleship courses and discussion groups, usually on Zoom, such as our Lent course and a Living in Love and Faith course.

During the last year there were two Weddings, one Baptism and one Funeral in Church. Confirmation services are currently alternated with St Francis, Bournville.

## Our mission and Outreach

**Little Pineapples** is the name of our well-attended stay and play which runs every Thursday morning. We have an average of 20 families join us each week for Little Pineapples with a volunteer team of six. Our families value how welcoming Little Pineapple is:

‘I really like the spaces and Gabriel enjoys the toys, but what I really value is the company of the other parents and talks with lovely people that run the group and/or volunteers – they are so kind and caring.’  
(Little Pineapples parent)

Mums, Dads, Grandparents and Childminders all feel comfortable to come to our group and the sense of community is amazing, enhanced by our shared story and song time, and our sung prayer at the end of each session. We also have a library that the children can

borrow books from each week. As well as our warm and spacious hall, we also have a beautiful garden which is used by the families between April and October with plenty of outdoor toys.

‘You are here, always a warm welcome and among friends. Most of all my granddaughter loves being here. It is somewhere to bring little ones to socialise and for parents to meet new people. There are friendly helpers and fruit and drinks for kids and for the adults.’

(Little Pineapples grandparent)





**Schools Work:** We have fantastic links with our local primary schools, Moor Green Primary Academy and Stirchley Primary School. Our Youth and Family worker, Ellie, runs the choir at Moor Green Primary Academy. This year the choir came and performed at our very busy Christingle Christmas Eve Service, which started what will become an annual tradition! Ellie also visits Moor Green to lead them in collective worship each term to mark Harvest, Christmas, Easter and Ascension Day. Ellie's son also attends Moor Green Primary School! The Year One children also visit the Church each year for their 'Place of Worship' RE Visit.

At Stirchley Primary School, Ellie is part of the 'Open The Book' Team with Stirchley Grace Church and Stirchley Community Church. She goes into the school once per month to deliver collective worship and tell Bible stories through drama, with the rest of the Open the Book Team. The Year Six children also visit the Church each year for their 'Place of Worship' RE Visit.

**Muddy Church and Community Lunch:** on the fourth Sunday of each month we host 'Community Lunch' and 'Muddy Church'. This is a bring-a-dish lunch for the community, followed by family worship in the garden. Muddy Church is inspired by <https://www.muddychurch.co.uk>. Families spend time in our beautiful garden together and join together in song, prayer, conversation and outdoor play and creativity. These are well-attended with between ten and twenty families.

**Family Festivals:** during the school holidays we put on family events to mark the Christian festivals. These include our annual Light Party, Pancake Party, Easter Egg Hunt and Carols on The Green. These are extremely popular with between 60 and 100 people attending. They have become staples of our community's calendar!

**Youth Zone:** our youth club is run in partnership with Riverside Church. We are a safe space for the young people to come and enjoy each other's company, play games, have fun, and receive the care and support of our Youth Leader team. Because of the nurturing nature of our youth club, we often attract youngsters with additional struggles in their lives, for example youngsters in foster care, those with additional needs such as autism and ADHD, and youngsters who are home-educated because they cannot cope in mainstream education.

We love our young people and we have a very supportive community of parents. We often



receive comments from parents that the youth club is the highlight of their week, or that they are a different child at the youth club compared with how they are at school. During each session the young people get to choose what to do (eg pool, table tennis, card games, team computer games, circus skills, lego, craft etc) and we always finish the session with a team game to bring them all together, and a prayer. We are a culturally diverse group but all the families are supportive of our Christian ethos.

Last year we took the young people to the Brecon Beacons for a Weekend Away in the countryside (plenty of hiking!) and this year we are taking them to Whitemoor Lakes in Staffordshire where they will get to experience activities such as sailing and rock climbing!

*‘The opportunity for young people to meet, socialise, engage in community activities and have fun is invaluable. I wish every area had something like YouthZone!’*

*(YouthZone Parent)*

**Stirchley Children’s Choir:** we have Family Worship at 9:15am-10 am every Sunday in the form of Stirchley Children’s Choir. We have ten families who join us each week with children aged between two and eight. Stirchley Children’s Choir was formed this year to offer our young families weekly worship that was fun and exciting for them. It has been great in bringing new families into the church community, for example by inviting the choir to perform at our Christingle Service. It is lovely to have the church full of young energy and laughter every Sunday morning as the children play in our lovely children’s corner.

*‘Thank you so much for starting the choir. It is the highlight of our week!’ (Choir Parent)*

**Place of Welcome** is held weekly on Thursdays from 11am to 1pm and is part of the City’s initiative to offer unconditional welcome to local people, offering free refreshments.

**Foodbank:** we collect donations of food and money for the B30 Foodbank. There is a substantial need for this service in the area.

## Parish Organisation

The PCC consists of 11 members including the incumbent. It normally meets about six times a year plus an ACPM. There is a Standing Committee which meets about seven times a year and consists of the incumbent, Churchwardens, Treasurer, Secretary and Lay Chair. There are currently 37 people on the Electoral Roll. The PCC is a charity exempted from registration with the Charity Commission. Members of the PCC are either ex officio or elected for a term of three years.

## Finance

The Ascension Stirchley continues to be financially stable in running at close to break even on income and expenditure. We have managed to continue to meet our commitments on providing full Common Fund requests from Birmingham Diocese during the period prior to, during, and post Covid. Giving levels have remained stable during the cost of living crisis, and income from Church Hall hire is a major factor in the financial stability of the church. Funerals and Weddings are not large providers of income to The Ascension. We have moderate amounts of Unrestricted and Designated reserves (£22k), together with Restricted reserves of £21K covering Outreach and Welcoming projects. We are a tight ship financially with expenditure closely monitored.

## Safeguarding

We are committed to maintaining our church as a safe place. We recognise the importance of keeping children and vulnerable adults free from harm and growing a safe culture. The PCC has complied with its duty under the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure and has due regard for the House of Bishop's Guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Most PCC members and Little Pineapples volunteers have completed training and DBS checks are routinely updated. Safeguarding is a standing item on PCC agendas.

## Eco Church

Our Eco Church journey at the Ascension started in earnest during Lent 2020. As a church we began studying the Archbishop's Lent book by Ruth Valerio, 'Saying Yes to Life'. Several individuals in our community were already engaged in environmental matters, but it was

during this Lent Course that we as a whole church community committed ourselves to try to live out the Fifth Mark of Mission more consistently, endeavouring to consider our responsibility to care for creation in all our decisions, including a land management plan which started our conversations about how we use our land and our buildings. We have achieved our Bronze Eco Church Award and have been working steadily towards our Silver Eco Church Award. Our actions to date include writing to our MP, meeting our MP together with other churches in B30, putting on an Eco Christmas Fair, building a bug house with Youth Zone, taking part in the Churches Count on Nature, planting daffodils during Big Green week with Little Pineapples, joining with other churches to make a Climate Change Blanket in the run up to COP 26, taking part in Climate Change Rally, Youth Zone taking part in a litter pick with our local councillor, changing to LED lighting in church and the church hall and moving our service to the church hall on cold Sundays during winter. For us at the Ascension care for creation is a central aspect of our discipleship and mission.

## Health and Safety

We are also committed to maintaining the physical safety of the Church. The health and safety policy is reviewed annually and copied to our insurers. Risk assessments are carried out as necessary and also reviewed annually. Health and Safety checks for hazards are carried out regularly. Dr David Veale (CMIOSH retired) is available to advise and oversee health and safety arrangements.

