



# St Paul Old Ford parish profile

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## WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

Our church is in the heart of the multi-cultural, multi-faith East End of London, where tower blocks, posh coffee shops, traditional markets, incredible schools, mosques and millionaire townhouses exist side by side.

The thousands of people who inhabit these spaces come from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds, speak many different languages, and have many different reasons for being here. Some are lifelong East Enders. Some are just passing through. Some are new families looking to make this area their home. Some feel trapped here.

**This is our community. This is where we want God to transform lives.**

Our church has experienced an astonishing transformation in recent times. So much has changed about our church and community since the St Paul's building reopened in 2004 as 'A New Heart for Bow'. And it continues to be at the centre of life in Bow, providing a space for a cafe, a community rehabilitation gym, a learning centre for young people and many other activities, all week long.

Our current vision and purpose statement for the parish is **Loving God, seeking transformation**.

This organises the main areas of our mission as a church community and helps direct our discussions

and plans. The vision was developed with the full participation of the congregation, reflecting our desire to involve everyone in our mission.

We are looking for a new vicar who can help us build on this vision. We want St Paul's to be a place where we keep loving God, and God's love is experienced in the church and beyond, in new and exciting ways. We want our church to be an even more inclusive and welcoming place, which can truly reflect the cosmopolitan nature of East London and serve the changing demographic of our parish.



### Welcome and hospitality

At St Paul's we are always trying to be welcoming in everything we do. The responses to a survey we did for this parish profile made it clear that St Paul's is a place where people feel welcome. It's a place where people can feel at home and be themselves. A place where they can find a spiritual family and feel accepted, whoever they are.

We continue to work to make our church an inclusive hub for the community, a place of welcome for people of all ages and backgrounds, all faiths and none, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled. In normal times, our building is used by community groups every day of the week.



Our café is an important focus of our welcome and hospitality at St Paul's. It's very popular with our congregation: over half of respondents to the parish survey said it was one of the parts of church life they enjoy the most, and it's one of the things they think St Paul's does well. It's also popular with the wider community, including visitors to Roman Road market, people using the Ability Bow gym, and those attending the homework clubs offered by IntoUniversity (these are both charities which lease space in our building).

At our services, nobody is turned away either from the church door or from the altar. Our policy on communion is straightforward: if visitors are accustomed to receiving the sacrament in their own church – no matter what denomination that is – they are welcome to do so with us. We also offer a blessing to all, including children. Anyone arriving late (and there are often many, sometimes with excited children) are welcomed with the same enthusiasm as those who arrived in time for the start of the service.

In normal times, we had monthly welcome lunches, where new people could meet existing church members and get to know more about St Paul's over a post-Sunday service lunch. We hope to resume these when restrictions are over.

Within our church community we use welcome and hospitality to develop our relationships and we do this through eating together and events, including summer barbeques, shared lunches after special services and going to Greenbelt festival together.

The pastoral team meets regularly to coordinate pastoral support for the church and community members and pray for those in need. They support death cafes, which are open to anyone seeking support in bereavement and to discuss death. There is also a Friday afternoon knitting group in the café that welcomes anyone from the community.

One of the most important parts of our welcome is simply having our doors open most days of the week from 9.30am to 7pm. The church is a place to meet, greet, and connect with all who come for coffee, exercise classes, meetings to support local services, children's birthday parties, and homework clubs. The building is well used by our community, rented out for blood donation, exercise classes, children's language groups, mehndi parties and much more.

Our welcome mission is also complemented by our long-term tenants. In the rafters, Ability Bow provides the only fully accessible gym for people with disabilities or long-term health conditions in the area. It's a remarkable place where people really have learnt to walk again.

Also, within the 'Ark' we have IntoUniversity. This education charity offers an innovative programme that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to attain a university place or another chosen aspiration.

Our welcome and hospitality also looks beyond the church building. We reach out to the community in personal and collective ways. Through the Mothers' Union, we have offered wellbeing days open to the public, collected toiletries for homeless guests at a local shelter, sent condolence cards and flowers to the bereaved and have a prayer network. During lockdown, the church has helped deliver food and medical supplies to people in the community, offered free meals for families during half term and delivered Christmas meals to those living alone. We are always thinking of ways to support people in need.

## Worship and prayer

Worship and prayer aren't just part of our purpose statement. They are hugely important parts of our life together at St Paul's. The vast majority (86%) of people responding to our parish survey said that worshiping God is one of the parts of church life they enjoy the most. And prayer is a big part of that – it's one of the main things that our survey respondents thought we do well as a church.

By worship, we don't just mean the part of the service where the music plays. We're talking about a broader definition of worship, including all of our Sunday services, as well as studying the Bible and praying together, and other acts of worship we do collectively.

Sharing the Eucharist together is hugely important to us, and we do this every Sunday. Music is also a vital part of our services, and it encompasses a variety of styles from congregational processions to gospel music to traditional hymns. While we follow the Church of England liturgy, our current style and order of service is informal and relaxed, to make sure that the whole congregation feels included in our worship.

During the pandemic we have been broadcasting our services online. Although we've begun to meet again in person, we will continue to stream services so that everyone who wants to worship with us can do so, even if they can't make it in person.

We're also a church that has been innovative in responding to changes in our parish, as can be seen from our work developing a new worshipping community on a boat in the Olympic Park (outlined in the St Columba section below).

We are a community powered by prayer and our parish survey was clear that this is something we do well. In normal times, we have midday prayer every weekday in the church. We offer open prayer and Bible study groups on Wednesday afternoon in the church and in the evening in the church and in a local pub (during lockdown, these happened online). We also have a men's group, which is a space for men to pray and grow together spiritually. Around 10 men meet several times a year to share their faith and listen to the testimony of others.

Our focus on community has drawn many into encountering God and praying here at St Paul's, whether they enter as volunteers, were married here, or just popped in through the church's open door, to the cafe, class, or another activity happening in the church.

Over the course of an average year, the church holds 9 baptisms, 2 confirmations, 2 weddings, and 13 funerals. We have a joint Palm Sunday service with St Barnabas Bethnal Green, the parish next to us. We also have an annual All Souls remembrance service, which is particularly popular, including with people who have moved away from the parish.



## Young people and children

Our work with young people and children is a big part of what we do and what we are. It's another of the main things that our survey said we do well and nearly a quarter of respondents also said that it was one of the things they enjoy the most about church life. Because it's so important to us, we employ a youth worker and also have a youth work apprentice funded primarily by the Diocese.

### Youth work

Rise is a weekly youth group, where young people can come, relax and just be themselves. Our aim is for Rise to be an environment where young people are 'raised up', encouraged and supported. We play games, table tennis, pool, cook and have topical discussions on issues such as mental health, diversity, racism and bullying. Pre-pandemic, 15 to 20 young people attended regularly, and we hope that these numbers will re-establish themselves.



In our youth Bible study, a group of 6 to 10 young people between 10- and 16-years old meet to study the Bible. This group is meeting again in the church building after being online in lockdown.

Youth Journey is our newest youth group. It's just starting up, but we want it to be a space where young people aged 16- to 23-years old can speak openly about struggles they face, while looking at spirituality and how their faith in Jesus can help in their everyday lives.

In September 2020 we started lunch clubs in a large local secondary school, welcoming up to 90 girls a week. It's an excellent way to meet young people in an environment that's familiar and comfortable to them. We focus on forming relationships and introducing ideas of church and God to the majority of children who do not have a family tradition of attending church.

On Sundays, a young people's group meets during the service. In the past few years, we've also had different Sunday services led by the young people including Mothering Sunday, harvest festival and one of our Good Friday services.

Mentoring by the youth worker is available to all the young people we work with. Each mentoring session is individually designed for the young person. We're currently regularly mentoring 8 young people.

We have encouraged our young people to help in the community by hosting specific events like litter-picks. We've also been away on camping trips and to Soul Survivor. We're now exploring new camps to take the young people on.

### Children's work

We love to invite local schools to St Paul's. In 2019 we had over 300 primary school children visit St Paul's to hear about the Nativity story and do Christmas crafts. We also invite schools to the church as part of their RE Christianity looking at prayer, communion, baptism and the Bible. Most of the local primary school children come from a Muslim or non-faith background, so this also feels like an important part of our welcome and hospitality, as well to encourage children and young people.



On Sundays, we have 2 children's groups which meet during the service. These are an under-5s group run by volunteer parents on a rota basis and a Sunday school (mainly primary age kids) run by volunteers. These groups have yet to restart after lockdown.

## St Columba

Following the 2012 Olympics, our church and the neighbouring parish St Mary of Eton wanted to explore how we could support the new communities that would be moving into the new developments being built in our parishes in the Olympic Park. The London Legacy Development Corporation would not let any religious buildings be built on the park, but the Diocese of London agreed to finance a purpose-built boat that could moor in the park.

Our barge-based ministry began at Hackney Wick in 2018 on a temporary boat and we took delivery of the Genesis in September 2020. Despite many setbacks, the community of St Columba has continued to grow, and we are excited about the opportunities the new barge creates to bless this community. Since arriving, the boat has won a design award and has featured in national and local press.

The vision for St Columba is to build with people who have no faith or connection with the church. With

that in mind, the community that meets on board is based around the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and acceptance of a power greater than self. We have created a space where people from all backgrounds can come and explore their spirituality in a space that is open, accepting and nurturing.

This ministry is headed up by our curate Dave Pilkington and his wife Christina. We have exciting plans as we head out of lockdown to see this community grow.



## WORKING WITH OTHER CHURCHES

The parish is part of the Bow Group of churches and the wider Stepney Deanery. The Bow Group is an informal group of Anglican parish churches of different traditions, all located within the Bow area. It exists so that the churches can support each other with upcoming events and projects, and with the opportunities and challenges that we have in common.

The Stepney Deanery has just released Stepney Lives, which is a vision for the Stepney Area of the Diocese of London. This includes the ambition for confident disciples, compassionate communities, and creative

growth. It has the priorities for the deanery to be younger, safer, and more racially diverse.

As well as looking forward to working with our next vicar on a renewed vision for the parish, we have also begun thinking about how we can engage with and enact the new strategy for Stepney Deanery. We look forward to working with them on this.

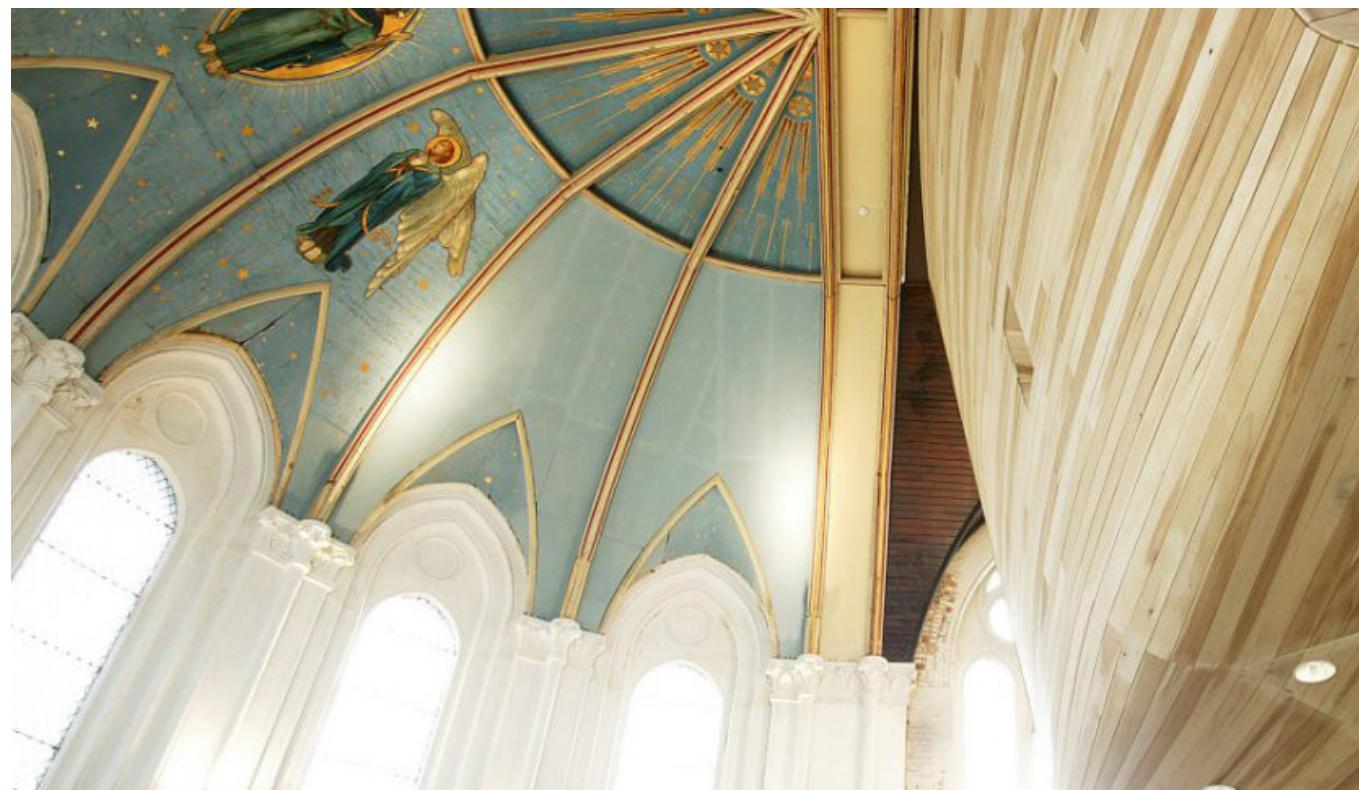
We are also part of the [Heartedge](#) network of churches. This group emphasises compassion, culture, congregation and commerce.

## THINKING GLOBALLY AS WELL AS LOCALLY

The church feels its responsibility to the global community strongly. In previous years we have been part of ALMA, the Diocese of London's companion link with the Anglican Church in Angola and Mozambique, particularly focused on building links with a church in Barrio Poplar, South Western Mozambique. More recently, we have been supporting members of our church family, the Quails, who are moving to Nicaragua for at least five years to undertake missionary and development work there. The church is part-sponsoring their time with EMI, and you can read more about the Quails on [our website](#).



St Paul Old Ford holds a silver Eco Church award, which we received in 2018. Eco Church is a Christian environmental scheme for churches run by [A Rocha UK](#), and we were one of the first London churches to receive a bronze award in 2017. Since then, we achieved our silver award, by providing further evidence of how we have made sure that environmental care is an integral part of our church life and mission.



## OUR NEW VICAR

### What we're looking for in our new vicar

We need a new vicar who can lead and thrive in our diverse, modern urban community with all the joys and challenges this includes. Someone who can build strong relationships within the church and across the community and bring energy and enthusiasm to this role.

#### In short, we are looking for a vicar who:

- can build strong relationships within the church and across the community
- is inclusive and non-judgemental, welcoming and approachable, and able to make warm connections with people from all walks of life
- is committed to prayer as an utterly vital part of their life
- has a passion for Jesus, loves the Bible and is excited about seeing God's word change lives in the church and the community
- will come to our parish to listen and learn, to see what's working well and what needs improving
- is a good strategic leader, who can build on our current vision for the church
- will take the congregation with them in their vision, communicating well and making sure everyone can participate
- will be a good team leader for the St Paul's staff team, with excellent people management skills, and will work well as part of the team
- understands the importance of pastoral care, is kind, caring, has empathy and is a good listener
- encourages leadership in others

Our survey tells us that the main thing that our congregation wants St Paul's to help them with is to continue to grow in their faith, so the new vicar will need to be someone who can inspire us to grow in our faith, both individually and together. It's also really important that they fully uphold St Paul's core characteristic of welcome and inclusion.

They will need to be able to handle the many practical aspects to our vicar's role as well. They'll be able to lead the day-to-day work of the staff team, and work well with the church wardens and the PCC, and the various committees which govern church life. But within these structures, they should feel confident to suggest different ways of working.

These characteristics are all things that our congregation is looking for and reflect what people said in our parish survey. Some people have joked that we want a superhero! We don't expect that, but we are very proud of our church and congregation and want our new vicar to have similar enthusiasm for the potential and dynamism of our area and the role of the church in it.

Since we are a church which values inclusion and diversity, we welcome and encourage applications from all qualified candidates, but especially from women, people from ethnic minority groups and other non-traditional backgrounds for church leadership. We want our new vicar to be committed to making sure that racism and other forms of discrimination have no place at St Paul's and doing all they can to make this a reality, not just a discussion.

In all our work, safeguarding is a big priority for us. We have provided safeguarding training and management for all our volunteers and leaders, and we are continually looking for more ways to make sure that all children and vulnerable adults coming into contact with St Paul's are protected from all harm. The new vicar will make sure that our processes evolve and continue to improve to keep everyone as safe as possible in all we do.

## ABOUT THE PARISH

The parish is a relatively new one - the parishes of St Paul and St Mark combined in the 20th century - but the wider area of Bow has been settled since at least Roman times. It has a rich and interesting history, which we have no room for here, but we do explore a little more on [our website](#).

The parish is also a relatively youthful one. A fifth of the residents are children, and half are under 30. Which makes our focus on youth work even more relevant.

Bow, like much of Tower Hamlets, is an exciting, culturally diverse and vibrant area with many opportunities to enjoy London life. It's a place where people from all walks of life live and work. It includes both wealth and deprivation and is a place with long and proud traditions.

Despite central and local government cuts in the past decade, development money has continued to pour into the area, taking advantage of the proximity to the City and Docklands, and ease of access to central London. There are a lot of new housing developments in the parish and surrounding area for people who can afford them.

However, this prosperity is not experienced equally. Our borough also has some of the highest levels of poverty in the country. Our parish is in the 11% most deprived in England. Many families live below the poverty line, and our local food banks in Bow and Bethnal Green (which we support) have been working flat out to meet need, even before the pandemic and much more so now. We also see common inner-city problems like drug and alcohol misuse, crime, and homelessness in our area.



Not all groups in the community feel equally welcome and valued but people have pulled together during the pandemic to supply half term lunches, businesses have been supporting each other and the Roman Road Trust has encouraged locals to know and utilise their local amenities.

The parish is bordered by some of London's most popular parks. The northern border includes a sizable chunk of Victoria Park, which is one of the most visited green spaces in London and was awarded the prestigious Green Flag award again last year.



The eastern side of the parish contains part of the Olympic Park. It also includes Fish Island and part of Hackney Wick. These areas were once heavily industrial, but in the past two decades have become home to thriving artistic and creative communities.

The 2012 Olympics has had a big effect on this area, because it came with money to improve the environment. And 9 years on, the redevelopment has ramped up, leaving the area unrecognisable as its former self. As a result, the parish population is expanding rapidly. It increased from 15,500 in 2011 (Census) to over 20,000 in 2018 (estimate) and will have increased even further since. This growth is part of the reason behind our partnership with St Mary of Eton, resulting in St Columba.

Cutting through the middle of the parish is the historic Roman Road, home to a long-standing and well-known market, which is still bustling despite being smaller than in its heyday. The pandemic has taken a toll on 'The Roman', but it remains a street that's constantly changing. The market, shops, cafes and restaurants now, as before, are a mix of long-standing institutions and new possibilities. Some of these old establishments have closed, but new ones have opened.

## BUILDINGS AND RESOURCES

### St Paul's church building

St Paul's is a grade II listed Victorian building dating from 1878, which had become derelict by 1991. Over the last 30 years, the church has undergone an astonishing rebirth.

After part of the ceiling collapsed and a subsequent fight to prevent closure, the church raised over £3 million not only to restore the building, but also to create 'A New Heart for Bow'. The church itself was transformed and rebuilt internally. It reopened in 2004 as a church and community hub, with a new worship space, a café, and an innovative modern internal building which we call 'The Ark' – located within the shell of the old church – which offers three additional floors.



The main worship area – in which some of the old wooden pews have been retained – comprises the nave and chancel of the original church. The redevelopment preserved the high domed ceiling of the Victorian building above the altar (complete with frescoes and stained glass). When the ground floor is fully opened, the worship area can seat up to 130 people, including the choir stalls.

Two alcoves towards the back are used for quiet prayer and contemplation. One of these accommodates the church's original font, which we use regularly for baptism. Remarkably, the church's original organ survived the period of dereliction, and has been fully restored. The organ plays an important role in the mix of traditional and modern worship in our services. Our church's bell has also been restored, and rings in the tower (sadly lacking its original Victorian steeple) on some special occasions.

We also have the Genesis barge for the St Columba community and soon hope to be managing and taking bookings for that space too.

### Vicarage

The parish vicarage is handily located next door to the main church building. It's a large detached Victorian house. There are four spacious bedrooms, large reception rooms, off road parking and newly expanded storage for the up to date kitchen. The vicarage garden backs onto the church and has often been used for services and summer celebrations. Although there is access to the vicarage garden, this is at the discretion of the vicar and the vicar has the only key.

The vicarage has a flat above and a flat below it. The top floor flat shares the fire escape with the church. Both flats are Diocesan glebe, and the vicar has a say in who the tenants of each flat are. The basement flat is currently undergoing a refurbishment and reconfiguration project, managed by the Diocese. The parish also owns a small flat nearby, historically used for a curate although rented out.

### Staff and volunteer team

The church has a curate, a part time associate priest, a self-supporting minister and a licensed lay minister. We have an active youth team, led by our youth worker, and a busy group of pastoral assistants.

We also have a venue manager, a front of house manager, a café supervisor, and a personal assistant to the vicar (who is still working for us during the vacancy). Collectively, the staff team works with hundreds of people every year, welcoming them into the church and helping to transform their lives as they develop their relationship with God.

We want to continue to offer community leadership and support as we come out of the pandemic. When we fully reopen again, we want the church to remain an accessible, open and welcoming place, where anyone can find their place, explore the spiritual dimension in their lives and grow in their faith in Christ.

The vicar will be responsible for overall management of the staff team to ensure all of this can happen well and develops as required.

## FINANCES

Like other churches, the pandemic has proved challenging to our finances. However, we remain in a healthy financial situation.

As we come out of the pandemic, we expect rental income and parish giving to resume and increase. We continue to contribute to the Common Fund and have increased our giving over recent years, far in excess of inflation, so that we have developed from being one of the smallest contributors to the Common Fund to being in the top half.

We have recently benefited from the Heritage Lottery Fund Cultural Recovery Fund. This includes a grant of £98,000 to finance a range of projects including a kitchen refurbishment for our café, new audio-visual equipment for the church, and buttress repairs. At the time of writing, these projects are in development.

We're particularly excited about the kitchen refurbishment and welcoming the congregation and local community back to the café and church buildings.

Most of our income comes from our property lettings. These are St Mark's Church, where there is a Montessori nursery and space within the church building, which we let out to Ability Bow and IntoUniversity. We also hire out rooms on an hourly basis to members of the community like mother and toddler groups, exercise groups and meetings for local businesses such as a doctor's practice. We want to move from dependence on this form of income to greater reliance on congregational giving.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

There are a number of challenges awaiting our new vicar, but among these are:

**01** Growing the congregation and enthusing everyone to reach out beyond our walls so others can discover God's love in Christ. This is something we've always had a focus on, but it takes on an extra dimension this year, because we've yet to discover the full effects of the pandemic on the congregation. Some people may have disengaged, but others have connected with us for the first time online.

**02** Amplifying the voice and role of ethnic minority worshippers. We have an ethnically mixed congregation, but this is not always well reflected in what people see at the front of the church, or in our governance structures, like the PCC. We want to make sure that everyone feels that they have a place here, and feel represented, and we have work to do on this issue.

**03** Responding to the disparities the pandemic has emphasised. These disparities are widely known across the country, but we want to make sure we know what these are and what to do about them in our area.

