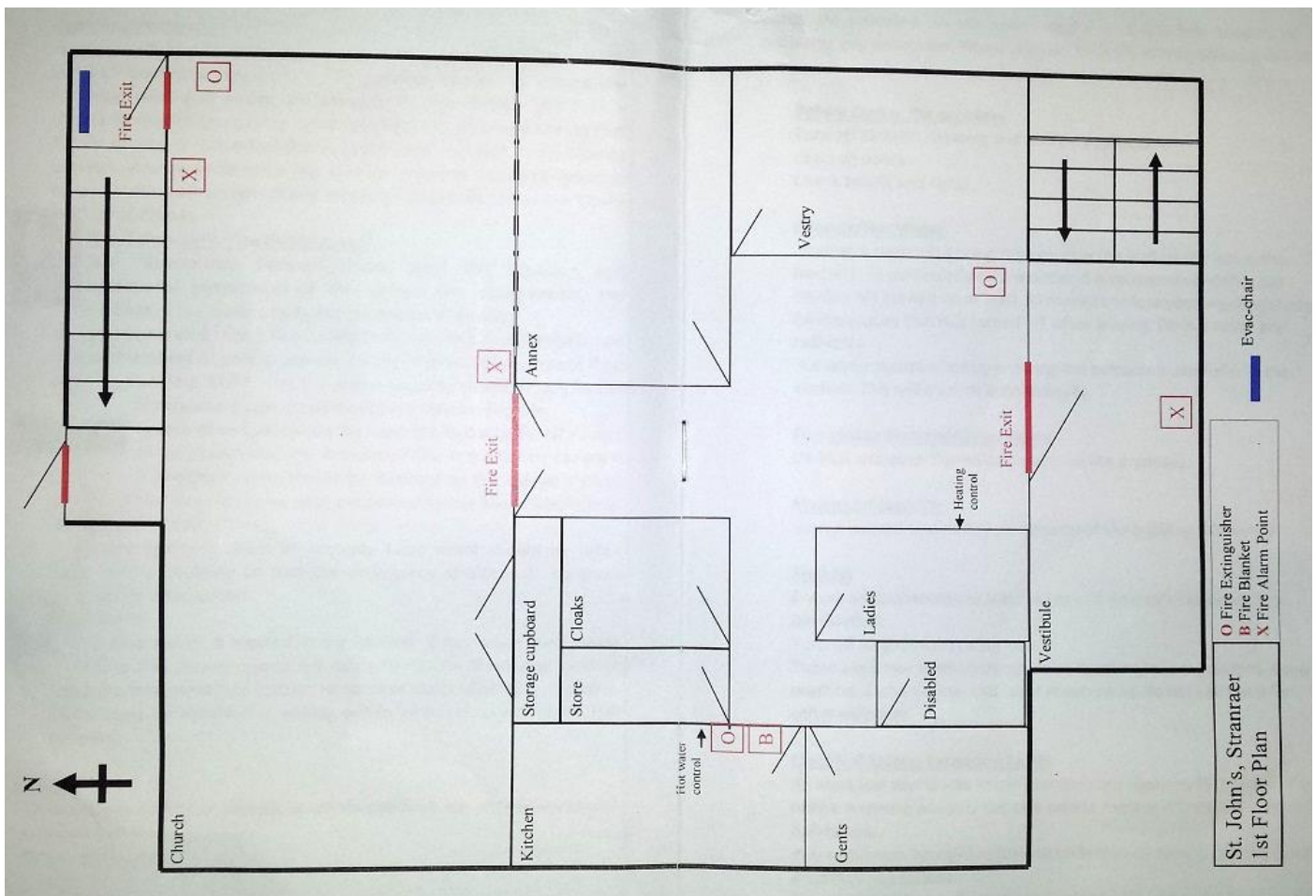


Congregational Profile of St John's Stranraer - 2021

The Church

St. John's (St. John the Evangelist, Stranraer www.stjohnsstranraer.co.uk) shares a central position in a modern building adjacent to the library and registrar. This was built in the 1990s when the original St John's was demolished to build what is now Morrison's supermarket. The church is on the first floor of the new building and benefits from a modern, well-cared-for appearance, easy maintenance and disabled access via a passenger lift installed in 2017. The space is adaptable and is currently used for a wide range of events by the church members and other groups from within the town and wider area. The staircase/lift leads to the Narthex off which are the kitchen, office, toilets and finally the church. An annex to the church is divided off by a folding door. The church is bright and airy with windows on two sides and views over the loch and marina.

We have mini stages and some lighting used enhance the experience of visiting musicians/hall users. We can also record and stream services etc.



1. Location

Stranraer is a former ferry port town with a population of around 12,000 located at the southern end of Loch Ryan in southwest Scotland. There is also a population of around 7000 in the neighbouring area of Wigtownshire (<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk>) The nearest cities by road: Dumfries 75 miles, Ayr 50 miles and Glasgow 85 miles. There are also rail to Glasgow and beyond, bus links both local and national, and Ferry links to Northern Ireland. The area is rich in local

history and has an extensive coastline with sandy beaches and pretty former fishing villages. It attracts tourists and summer visitors. The council and local people are discussing ways to continue the redevelopment of the waterfront to further encourage visitors and provide amenities for the local population. (<https://www.stranraerdevelopmenttrust.co.uk/>), (<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk>). There is some light industry, a large cheese factory and the surrounding countryside is farmland.

The town has four primary schools, one large Academy (a comprehensive school) and a Further Education institute, part of the Dumfries & Galloway College with links to the University of Glasgow. (Park Primary School, Rephad Primary School, Sheuchan Primary School, Belmont Primary school, St Josephs RC Primary, Stranraer Academy, Dumfries and Galloway College, Stranraer Campus (<https://www.dumgal.ac.uk/>)).

The Ryan Centre has an indoor pool and leisure facilities including a gym and cinema/theatre (<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/ryancentre>). A wide range of clubs, groups and societies for adults and children, from pipe bands to weaving and spinning, are all available in the area. (<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/>). There are several golf courses, tennis courts and bowling greens. Sailing and fishing are popular sports. Stranraer held the World Skiff racing championships in 2019 which doubled the population of the town. Due to the excellent water facilities it is likely to be held here again in the future. There is an annual Oyster Festival (<https://www.stranraerdevelopmenttrust.co.uk/of-home-2>) and a planned development of water sports on the loch. There is already a yacht club and the skiff group have a new purpose built shed where the boats are made and stored. The skiffs are regularly seen using the loch. (<http://www.stranraerwatersports.com/>). The Millennium centre, in the centre of town, has been redeveloped as a community activities/music venue (<https://www.facebook.com/StranraerMillenniumCentre/>). There is a local FA football team with its own ground as well as many amateur teams (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stranraer_Athletic_F.C.). There is curling in the winter with a curling rink in the town available to all skill levels (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/112236762129292/>)

There is a new Community Hospital in Stranraer, Health Centre (GPs), several Dental Practices (including one N.H.S) and other Holistic Practitioners. These are backed up with specialist hospitals in Dumfries, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The area has the benefit of a mild climate due to the Gulf Stream and this leads to many beautiful gardens open to the public including part of the Scottish botanical gardens at Logan. (<https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/logan-botanic-garden/>)

There is a large seasonal population due to the number of caravan sites in and around the town.

2. Services

Regular Eucharist services are held at 11 am on Sundays (1982 Scottish liturgy) and Thursdays (1970 Scottish liturgy– pre-COVID). Additional services: Saints' Days, a Carol Service, Remembrance, Christmas and Easter are arranged as necessary. Through necessity, we are regular users of the liturgy using the Reserved Sacrament. We enjoy our regular forms of worship and have adapted to changes guided by recent Rectors who have also developed a collaborative ministry– congregation members reading the lessons and leading the intercessions, also with Lay Worship Leaders and a Pastoral Team. Our worship could be described as 'middle of the road' but

reflects that of a forward-looking congregation, and our style includes the modern as well as the traditional in language, music and liturgy. We consider the forward-looking aspect by using more online resources by videos, and recorded music and use of MP3 tracks to enrich the spiritual variety. We have facilities to live-stream as necessary. We worship with reverence within a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Refreshments are served after every service encouraging further contact with friends and visitors.

The church has a piano and a modern electronic organ; hymns for worship are projected via a computer and LCD projectors. The computer can also provide music accompaniment when an organist is unavailable. The sound system enables a loop for those with hearing-aids, and liturgy booklets are available in large print and in Braille.

3. The Congregation

The Communicants Roll consists of 19 members additionally there are non-communicants and regular visitors who boost the numbers in the holiday season. Our congregation is scattered over considerable area with only a few from the town itself. The congregation on a Sunday is usually around 16. The Thursday services were normally just a handful of participants.

The age of the congregation would be described as *older but very energetic and involved* and all have at least one job in the church and some more than one. There are no under 18s at present, except visiting grandchildren in school holidays. We are a very welcoming group and always engage with visitors over refreshments after every service. We have an active Vestry from our congregation responsible for everyday administration. The congregation also participate in choosing hymns, organising the service rota, taking turns as projectionist, serving tea and coffee, flower arranging and dealing with minor church maintenance. Our congregation are widely involved in the community, serving on committees, volunteering or being members of the numerous and wide ranging groups that are active in the town. (e.g U3A, Bowling Club, Men's Shed, local Car Club, Versusarthritis, St John's Patient Transport, Talking Newspaper, Ramblers and Choirs)

Many of our congregation are incomers with an Anglican background and find a spiritual home in the Episcopal Church at St John's. Many of our members have chosen to live in this area and feel very fortunate to be in such a peaceful and beautiful place. Lots of people from England choose to retire here and families find it a lovely place to raise their children. Despite being without a priest for nearly four years and the intervening Covid pandemic the worship leaders have steadfastly maintained the congregation using the reserved sacrament consecrated by visiting priests from across the Diocese.

4. Laity

We have a team of three licensed Lay Worship Leaders, who assist at services and/or administer the Holy Communion using the Reserved Sacrament. This team has been particularly active since our last priest's retirement. Our Lay reps are actively involved with the Region, Diocese and at Synod, despite the long journeys that are often necessary to attend, although since the pandemic the diocese has embarked upon a schedule of virtual and periodic physical meetings which will allow us to engage much more easily.

5. Community and Outreach

The congregation is particularly active and have been strong fundraisers in the past. In 2016/17 around 50% of the cost of the lift was provided through a number of fundraisers, from afternoon teas to an American Boy Choir concert, with the balance being grant funded. We have numerous 'Fellowship Nights' which can be anything from Burns suppers to quizzes or film nights and provide opportunities to invite friends and neighbours to our church.

Twice a year a service is provided by our pastoral team at Thorneycroft one of our local residential home. There may be opportunities to visit local schools due to the changes in the local Church of Scotland reorganizations.

Like other churches in the Diocese, we have completed parts 1&2 of our Mission Action Plan (MAP). We have identified some further points that would assist in our outreach and we want to work with the new priest in developing these in the post-pandemic context. The installation of our lift to improve access for all was an initial priority in our MAP and now we are concentrating on advertising and promoting our building and encouraging other groups to use our church premises. We attracted 15 other groups during 2018 (Ladies Choir, Versus Arthritis, U3A different groups, Craft Groups, SANDs, Local History, Music for All, Stranraer Brass amongst other). The group are slowly returning as they are able to after the pandemic period of restrictions on capacity.

The church has a Facebook page, (www.facebook.com/StJohnsStranraer/) and a Website (www.stjohnsstranraer.co.uk) where we advertise and share our news and events.

The church supports a number of local charities on a regular basis: APEX (our local Trussel Trust Foodbank provider), Christian Aid, Mission to Seafarers and Aberlour, the children's charity. We also support a child in Ecuador through Compassion. Further donations are usually made to other very local charities after being voted for at our Annual Congregational Meeting.

6. Proposed agreement with a resident priest

We are looking for an enthusiastic, prayerful leader who would also be forward-looking and enable us to develop our ministry, mission and spirituality. We would wish for a priest who would:

- Respect our present procedures and practices and actively develop our individuality, but who would challenge us to broaden our vision;
- Spend an equal share of his/her time at St John's; Support our Worship Leaders in their ministry and offer them regular meetings and continuing training and support;
- Encourage a wider outlook to our worship and introduce us to other ways of worshipping.
- Show interest in our congregation and get to know each of us as individuals for the people we individually are.
- Be involved both spiritually and socially at St John's at all activities in our life together. Interact with the local community and with the other churches in the area where there is opportunity for new initiatives
Raise the profile of St John's locally; e.g, being visible and engaging with "people on the street".

"We wish to grow our congregation in order to develop ourselves and have an impact in the community."

We are, as Continuing from our Mission Action Planning we are advertising ourselves and promoting our building and becoming more outward-looking through education, concerts, and

events, in addition to our regular services. We aim to increase our congregation, widen the age group and ensure that St John's flourishes into the future.

We are beginning to address the ecological challenges through our engagement with the 10 Points of Action on the Climate Crisis given to us by the General Synod.

7. Covid 19

The pandemic came as much a shock to St John's as to all of the country. Services stopped with immediate effect and the building closed instantly cancelling all our user groups.

We had no facilities within the building to continue online services and the majority of the digitally minded congregation followed the Provincial and Diocesan services online. The non-digital members were contacted but despite offering equipment and training were reluctant to be 'connected'. The congregation kept in touch by emails, phone calls and 'round robin' newsletters.

A Zoom subscription was donated by a congregation member and the congregation met socially with monthly quizzes and other online gatherings and discussions.

We as a church have realised the benefits using Zoom as living in Stranraer there was always the need to travel some distance to attend meetings. This is not however the case now and the Lay reps etc have actually joined in more Diocesan events. The future opportunities for training have been opened up considerably with the future use of various online platforms. Thanks to the Recovery & Renewal Provincial Grant we have installed WIFI and a Zoom package to facilitate live-streaming and other online engagement. This will benefit the church services and could allow our shared priest to be in two places at once relaying services between the two churches if required.

It would be hoped that a new priest could encourage us to use these facilities in a much wider context than at present especially across the younger population.

We hope that this will encourage a wider use of the building and attract back more of the user groups once all restrictions are lifted.

8. Finances

St John's is financed through regular offerings from the congregation, boosted by Gift Aid and generously supported by a Mission Support Grant. We have funds invested in the Provincial Trust Pool from our share from the sale of a previous rectory. This money has been ring fenced for the upkeep of the church building. We have always been able to meet our obligations. Scottish Charity No. SC02332

Appropriate accommodation will be provided by the Diocesan Property Committee.

Please read this document in conjunction with the video which provides more visual material to enable you to grasp more fully the opportunities at St John's.