

Bridge of Weir
St Mary's
Episcopal Church
Johnstone Road,
Bridge of Weir,
PA11 3RA



Introduction

At St Mary's in Bridge of Weir, we are a kind and faithful community of Christians. We are often told we "punch above our weight" when considering our impact on the local community. Our members are generous in their stewardship; not only in their financial resources, but also in their resources of time and talent.

We are looking for imaginative and faithful clergy person or team to join us in this season of renewal and growth. As members of a linked group of charges we recognise that on the surface it may appear, due to our size and demographic, that we are quiet congregations with basic spiritual and practical needs. On the contrary! The charges of the Heartland Group are active and engaged groups of worshipping Christians who desire to reach beyond our walls into our communities and beyond.

We require clergy who are skilled in pastoral care, Christian formation, community building, preaching, teaching, and administrative leadership. We are looking for clergy who will see the opportunities for growth and community change that are possible in our settings and have the vision and leadership skills to encourage us to live more fully into this renewed vision for the Kingdom in the Heartland region and beyond.

Description of our Church and Community

Bridge of Weir is a village eight miles north of Paisley. Predominantly a dormitory settlement for Glasgow and Paisley; it has a tight-knit community feel. We enjoy a small range of shops, doctors' surgery, vets, takeaway shops, cafés, and two excellent restaurants. Children in the village attend [Bridge of Weir Primary School](#), which also features an excellent nursery class.



When they are ready for Secondary school, the children travel to [Gryffe High School](#) in Houston, only a few miles up the road. Gryffe High School has a stellar reputation and was named The Sunday Times Scottish State Secondary School of the Year in 2020.

There are two Church of Scotland congregations and a Brethren Assembly in the town. (There is a Roman Catholic Church, St. Fillan's, a short trip away in Houston.) St Mary's is just outside the village which sometimes makes integration challenging. That said, we have a good relationship with the ecumenical partners in town and when we have needed a larger space to hold certain pastoral offices, special services, or events, the Church of Scotland congregation just up the road from us has always been kind and accommodating. Over the past two years of the pandemic, we have been able to join in various events, some on Zoom, during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.

Our well-maintained church, built in 1909, is small but this leads to its charm and its local nickname, "The Little White Church in the Wood". While we have no church hall nor space to build one, a new kitchen, renovation of the bathroom, and a complete re-decoration of the church were undertaken in the past few years. The grounds are maintained by the council's Community Service Programme.

Worship



Our congregation averages 14-16 at our weekly, 10am service on Sunday morning. We celebrate the Holy Eucharist, using the 1982 Scottish Episcopal liturgy three Sundays out of the month and Matins is said, often by our lay worship leader from Kilmacolm, on the third Sunday of the month. Each of our services

features hymns and service music. We have a wonderful electric organ and are blessed to have two members of our congregation who volunteer to play for us.

We are open in our churchmanship. Several members of our congregation attend the mid-week services in our sister churches in the Heartland Group.

In addition to the regular services during the year, we also host a Carol Service each Advent that is an ecumenical endeavour and packs the church! We invite local councillors, clergy and ecumenical church leaders, as well as those from our sister churches in the Heartland Group, to read the lessons and lead the prayers.

Under the leadership of our previous priest, we started an annual St Francis Pet Blessing Service. It was a wonderful opportunity to give thanks to God for all creatures great and small.



During festival seasons, we collaborate with the other churches of the Heartland Group for joint worship opportunities. This year, for example, the services of Holy Week were held in each of the three churches. It was a wonderful opportunity to work and journey together during this special time. We hope that under the leadership of new clergy we may establish a more frequent pattern of shared worship to encourage us not only

to work together but to worship together as well.

Fellowship and Christian Formation

We are also a congregation who appreciate the opportunity to participate in studies and classes to deepen our understanding of the Bible and grow our faith. In the past we have had a weekly Bible study led by our Lay Reader and participated in seasonal courses for Lent and Advent.

Our Regional Curate led a Lenten Course in 2021 over Zoom and some of our members were grateful to participate. Similarly, the Regional Curate and our Dean led morning prayer via Zoom and YouTube during Holy Week this year (2022) and we appreciated the chance to join together as a region to pray.

St Mary's has a longstanding Ladies Group that meets monthly in each other's homes, planning (in normal times) fundraising events, outings, visits to other groups locally and more.

Mission, Outreach, and Events

St Mary's has a small and very committed congregation, who work well together. We are an outward-looking congregation open to new ideas and wish to see growth in our numbers. Our outreach tends to be cerebral as in our annual lecture (pre-pandemic) where speakers were chosen for their special interests and areas of knowledge, sharp intellect and ability to springboard discussion if not friendly controversy. It is our hope we will be able to restart the annual lecture series next year with the help of our new priest.



Our small numbers make being friendly easy, but it does mean everyone has to pull their weight, which they do. Members of the congregation volunteer regularly in St Mary's, Port Glasgow outreach and mission with the Heartland Circle. We contribute items for the Charity Shop.



St Mary's is ecumenically minded and we support the activities of other churches in the town. We were instrumental some years ago in helping in the formation of "The Bridge" - a churches-led Post Office and community centre. We are joint trustees in this venture, but renewal will be needed post-pandemic. Recently, we also contributed to St Machar's online virtual Advent and Lent calendars and their illustrated Bible Readings in Holy Week. These resources were made available to the whole community.

Our congregation participates in the annual community Doors Open Day and finds it to be an excellent opportunity to welcome those in the area who may not have seen our church before. For two years our Associate Priest and his wife put on a puppet show, telling biblical stories with puppets made by them to keep visiting children (and the rest of us) entertained while their parents had a cup of tea.

Some of the organisations and funds we regularly support include: The Bridge, Christian Aid, the Trussell Trust Food Bank (items collected from the congregation and delivered monthly), Fair Trade efforts, Farm Africa, and the Bishop's Annual Lent Appeal.

The Heartland Group

We have always been linked with another congregation, first with the Cathedral and then St Fillan's in Kilmacolm – and most recently as part of the Heartland Group. Each church retained its own identity, officials and traditions, but shared clergy, finances and participation in outreach and mission activities such as The Heartland Circle, the Clyde Men, the Bridge of Weir Festival, Bible Study Groups and weekly Coffee, Cake, and Prayer.



Under the guidance of our Transitional Minister, our three congregations discerned whether there was a future for our linkage and we

concluded that we had been better together, so decided to continue the linkage with a slightly different Constitution based on experience. Since then we have worked together through the vacancy and the trials of Covid and lockdown.



This history of collaborative leadership and worship has led to our church having a flexible and easy-going personality. We are happy to go with the flow, roll up our sleeves, and find creative solutions to challenges as they arrive.

One of the major learnings from the past 7+ years of the Heartland linkage is that this job cannot be done by one priest working alone. An ideal scenario would be to find 2 priests with complementary skill sets and a similar strategic vision to work with the group in a way that builds leadership from within and encourages shared mission and ministry. Other models of ministry are certainly possible, but without at least two committed individuals our charges will suffer. It is impossible for clergy to be everywhere at all times, we do recognise and respect this – however, we also know that linked churches with shared clergy often fail to thrive because all of their personnel resources (i.e. the priest’s time) are poured into the survival of existing worship schedules and mission/formation programmes at the expense of pastoral care, imaginative outreach, new programmes, and community relations. Some of this can be alleviated by building up the lay volunteers, but as you will find from reading our profiles – our lay volunteers are already serving in a variety of ways.

We are hopeful that we will find new clergy who recognize the wealth of opportunities for deep spiritual growth that exist in ministering to a small, mature congregation. But don’t let that fool you! Despite our congregation’s demographic, we are active in worship, fellowship and service not only in our local community, but also across the various mission, outreach, and worship initiatives throughout the charges of the Heartland Group.



Our current Transitional Minister remarks that her spirit is lifted each time she is able to lead worship with us. We truly believe that any priests called to the Heartland Group will find us to be a welcoming and supportive church who are keen to deepen our faith, broaden our reach, and worship our Lord.

Conclusion

While we are small in number, we work well together, try always to take a positive attitude, and are very willing to be helpful to new clergy in any way we possibly can. We feel we are naturally flexible in our approach, adaptable, and accepting.

We hope our new clergy will continue to develop the existing co-operative attitude of the three churches in the Heartland Group, finding innovative ways to help us to work as three parts of a positive unit. We are seeking an optimistic priest who will help us to discern where God is calling us in 2022 and beyond.

