

PARISH PROFILE – St Marys Birnam

St Mary's church was built in 1858 in the centre of Birnam, which was growing rapidly after the arrival of the railway. Attracted by the beautiful surroundings increasing numbers of visitors came to holiday in the area and the church grew in response, with the addition of the side isle, tower and vestry. Stain glass windows in the side isle designed by Burne Jones and constructed by Morris & Co are especially notable. The permanent congregation has always been relatively small.

After a diocesan review the linked charge of Strathtay was reassigned to Pitlochry and from 2014 St Marys has been linked with the smaller but geographically closer congregation at St Columba's Stanley six miles away, where the diocese saw potential for expansion. There are services at 9.30 in Birnam and 11.15 at St Columbas using the 1982 liturgy and St Marys has recently adopted the 2013 edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern. There is an informal communion service at St Marys on Thursday morning followed by coffee and discussion which has recently grown. Music is an important part of St Marys, although the size of the congregation does not extend to the luxury of a choir, the liturgy is sung and the organ used for concerts and recitals in addition to services.

St Marys has always contributed to and been involved in the local community. Close links are maintained with the Church of Scotland at Dunkeld Cathedral and the Catholic Church, including the jointly run charity shop and the weekly community coffee morning, which moves from Dunkeld to St Marys during the summer. Joint services are held in Holy Week and all the churches worked on the outreach initiative of discussion and worship, "Bridging the Gap".

Finance: After a difficult period in 2014-15 round a rectory extension project and appointment of a new full time rector, we now have costs under control, have developed financial reporting and an appropriate budget for our financial resources. An important source of both income and community engagement is the three churches charity shop in Dunkeld staffed by volunteers from all the churches and community. We hold a modest legacy in a designated fund for emergencies.

Buildings: The church has been well maintained over the years, the tower being reroofed in 2002. The latest quinquennial survey was carried out in 2016 and we addressed the high priority items in 2017 using "restricted" funds. It is expected this will then continue on an annual basis, possibly with the addition of grant aid, for the other aspects of the work. This will ensure the fabric of the church is protected for the future. The 1874 Forster and Andrews organ, restored by Sandy Edmonstone of Perth in 1993, has certification from the British Institute of Organ Studies (2013). There is also a Challen upright piano.

The rectory was built in the 1980s at the rear of the church at the heart of the community. It was extended in 2014 and has two double bedrooms, a single bedroom, study, large living room and a kitchen/dining room. There is a meeting room with separate access. It has gas central heating and double glazing. It is surrounded with a small, easily kept garden.

Discernment process

In 2016 in the knowledge of the coming vacancy the rector invited all members of the congregation to meet in small groups to explore what members felt were the essential qualities of St Marys. This produced the following results:

At every meeting appreciation of the uplifting Sunday worship was mentioned. The quality and enjoyment of the music was of particular note. The prayerful nature of the church, both through the clergy and members of the congregation was a source of spiritual strength. It was felt there had recently been spiritual growth and development. The building of St Marys contributed a feeling of a

sacred space, even non attending members of the community value this, so it was felt important to attempt to keep the church open to all, at least during the summer months.

Pastoral care and fellowship were felt to be important. Although not requiring church social activities, many people valued being supported by the clergy and church members. It was felt important that this pastoral care and sense of community should be maintained during the vacancy.

Thirdly, members felt that their involvement in the wider Dunkeld and Birnam community was an important feature of the mission of St Marys. Extremely good ecumenical relations exist between churches in the community, for example with joint services, sharing the Friday morning meeting place, joint running of the charity shop. Individually members of St Marys make many other contributions to the community, which is seen as an important part of their Christian ministry.

Aims for the Future

The above attributes were then considered to establish how the congregation can develop these strengths for the future. It is hoped that any future priest, while we recognise their part time capacity, would work to support, encourage and develop these aspirations.

It is important that all members of the congregation should be encouraged to participate in Eucharistic worship according to their individual gifts, particularly encouraging men who at present are under-represented. Provision should be made for the inclusion of children in the service.

A pastoral care group had received basic training for the vacancy and the growth of this small group both in numbers and expertise would be of value to the wider congregation. As there is already a culture of "looking out for" their neighbour, both in the congregation and the wider community, the role of the whole congregation in being tactfully aware and reacting to needs should be supported.

Discussion, conversation and debate should be encouraged to strengthen and develop the faith of the congregation, enabling them to reach out beyond those normally attending church. Practical action such as opening the church daily could be extended and participation in ecumenical activities maintained. The informal Thursday morning service could be used to develop seasonal initiatives, such as in Lent and Advent.

After careful budget consideration it is likely the post will be offered at about 33% of stipend, with the addition of use of the rectory, council tax and parish expenses paid. [JOHN FS IMPUT HERE]

The following were felt to be key attributes in a future priest:

Spiritual leadership and inspiration

Strong pastoral care, a "people person"

Positive ecumenical engagement

Visibility in the community

Good communication skills

