

St Paul's Parish, St Agnes Church, Bristol



April 2009



An introduction to the parish



St Paul's Parish is at the heart of inner city Bristol and St Agnes Church is at the heart of St Paul's Parish. Confusing isn't it? We continue to call ourselves St Paul's Parish because that is the name of the Bristol 'area' that we predominantly serve. Four of the original five churches are left. St Simon's is used by the Greek Orthodox Community, St Werburgh's is a climbing centre and St Paul's is a circus school. St Agnes is the church we worship in. It is part church, part parish hall and part offices used by community groups. It is a place of sanctuary in an increasingly challenging world.

St Paul's was stigmatised by the riots of the 1980s and it would be disingenuous to claim that that is all over and there are no longer any problems. This is an inner city and there are drugs and prostitution and homelessness and crime but it would be a mistake to see that as the overarching picture. The wide-ranging nature of our parish is illustrated by the fact that it includes part

of the major new retail development of Cabot Circus. You can gain a good impression of community life from the St Paul's Unlimited Community Partnership newsletter (www.stpaulsunlimited.org.uk).

St Paul's is a diverse, multi-cultural, welcoming and exciting place where people are accepted wherever they come from. A fine example of this is St Paul's Carnival, a truly vibrant event held in July every year. It is an event that draws thousands of people to St Paul's from the surrounding area and most major cities in England. Church members and neighbours, schools and community organisations join together to eat, drink and be merry whilst dancing in the streets and enjoying performances by local and nationally-celebrated musicians. It remains the most important and enjoyable neighbourhood event of each year!



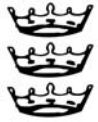
The eucharist is important to us – our approach to worship is illustrated by a “blessed informality”. Reflecting on their experience with us, a recent visitor characterised our approach to the faith as “incarnational”.

We are also part of the Inner City Partnership, four adjoining parishes who try to work together, worship together, share skills and problems. The other three parishes are:

- St Luke's Barton Hill (www.stlukesbartonhill.org.uk)
- St Anne's Eastville
- Easton Christian Family Centre (www.ecfc.org.uk).

Any person appointed to this post would have the support of the other clergy in the group and be expected to work for part of their time within the partnership.

Some of our congregation have written about what St Agnes means to them. These paragraphs describe us better than anything written above. We hope they will make you want to come and see for yourself! There are photos too!



I am delighted to be writing a small profile about The St Agnes Church from the perspective of a church-goer for the last 12 months. Perhaps simply because it's a place for spiritual and pastoral care, St Agnes church community has an outstanding and unique friendliness and acceptance to all people from all walks of life who join them. You get impressed right away at the calmness and yet mature manner in which the community goes about business in a very honest, neat and very tidy environment. Many church-goers actively and mostly voluntarily dedicate time to run the different activities that go far beyond the walls of the church building, right into the wider St Pauls community and neighbourhood. It's very easy to get involved, feel loved, respected and at the same time welcome. In other words the St Agnes church is a well rounded institution that provides a holistic pastoral service to the St Pauls community.

The St Pauls community has gone through turbulent times that occasionally tend to obscure the beauty and richness of the community, marked by sometimes historic problems traceable from the legacy of slave trade which was a major activity during the era of the Bristol slave trade, to very modern times social problems relating to crime and drugs, immigration etc. However there is a remarkable improvement and growth marked essentially by the spirit of community awareness and oneness and the inhabitants' own desire to self-improve which is very alive as you pass through the place.

I have lived in St Pauls for the last 5 years and I have been and continue to be a passionate defender of the reputation of our community. I love St Pauls and its features, its proximity to the city centre, the rich culture and the friendly people among other things. The character of St Pauls is changing and improving every day every year. There has been massive redevelopment in terms of housing with new properties being put up. The school grades are reported to be improving and getting better.





When I was 18, I spent a summer volunteering at a Notting Hill church. It was the first time I had experienced the vibrancy and colour of a multi-racial, multi-cultural area and in 45 years I have never lived anywhere else.

In 1982 I joined St. Agnes Church as I was living and working locally. I love the diversity of the St. Paul's area, the sense of community still to be found in the inner city. I like that I can greet my Muslim neighbours on the street in the way that strangers greet one another in the countryside and I love the traditions of hospitality and celebration which abound in the Afro-Caribbean community. Undoubtedly it is painful living where the poor and dispossessed congregate, but as Christians, we are called to neighbourliness and to the margins. At St. Agnes we benefit from that generosity of spirit at the heart of the Afro-Caribbean community and all who step through our doors are received and welcomed unconditionally. To be part of St. Agnes is to receive 'Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over....poured into your lap'.



After moving from London to Bristol I was searching for some time for a church to worship, after I was introduced to St Agnes by a friend.

After my first visit, and second I decided to make St Agnes my place of worship. Then on after the atmosphere was magic, people come to welcome you and make you feel at home, I always remember Malcolm Henry to this very day he is very good at making you feel welcome.

I got to meet Father Peter who was the priest in charge at the time, we had had a chat with him and that is when I told him I had desires to renew my vows to start taking communion again, one of the greatest things I ever did in my life.

Since then my whole life has changed in every way meeting lovely people in every walk of life visiting St Agnes the atmosphere is faultless in every way.

Seeing is believing so keep inviting and bringing family and friends to join us at St Agnes.



An urban context allows us the choice to select and find a place where we can come before God as honestly as we can, and say a YES to the style of worship, the sense of community and the theology proclaimed but what drives us more often than not to find our place of worship? We are looking for a place to feel at home. .

I moved to Bristol in 1995 from Vauxhall in South London. There I had been worshipping in at St. Anne's Church with a 60-70% black congregation; half of the black congregants were Caribbean of origin and half were West African. The gospel preached there was intelligent open and inclusive with enough space for doubt and moral ambiguity.

So when coming to St. Agnes I felt at home. To worship in a congregation that really reflects the true picture of Anglicanism in its world wide vision rather than a very "English" Church of England, is a real privilege. The church has a rich high church but human and messy liturgical tradition, which I enjoy. It is an incredibly inclusive Church and welcomes all, and most importantly for me it is a church that does not tell me how to live or what to believe and gives space for doubt. It preaches a gospel of the Love of Gods that draws people to the Hope of Glory. It is a church that has a heart for the poor and supports the Sisters of the Church in their work with the Homeless and prostitutes. In my time at St. Agnes I have also appreciated the encouragement to be reflective and the nurturing of spirituality.. regular retreats and quiet days are on offer. Whilst worshipping at St. Agnes I have had two children who are mixed race (their father is Black British of Caribbean origin) . It has been a rich part of their life to come to a community that is majority Black and be part of that group. From a young age they have had to learn to accept embraces from enquiring elders and learnt to honour those who are not their blood relatives.

St. Agnes has been, for 13 years, our Place to feel at Home, to come before God.





The reason I got involve with St Agnes Church my brother is part of the congregation, I was working shift and convince myself I did not have time for Church. I was invited one Sunday

The welcome i receive the atmosphere i felt touch. I made time for Church now i am Church Warden Pcc member also Deanery Synod.



We moved from London to Bristol last summer and were keen to find a church that we could make our home. We were delighted to find St Agnes just the other side of the M32 which is Eucharistic with a family feel to it. We really like the fact that people worship together from different cultural backgrounds. It is important for us to be able to worship without being constantly worried about how our 2 lively young boys are behaving. The children's church is really important for us and the fact that children are pretty much accepted as children... I don't think that they have been 'shushed' yet... apart from by us of course!





I was brought up in a Christian home back in Jamaica. My parents were members of the local Church of England.

When I came to Bristol St Agnes Church was just around the corner so I attended there back in the 1960's and I felt very welcomed. I got married in St Agnes but when I started a family I found it difficult to attend church what with having four children under 5. Although I didn't have the time to go I made sure that my children attended with a family friend. Later I got confirmed and I have been attending ever since.

I can honestly say that I was welcomed by all the congregation when I first went to St Agnes. I did not feel as if I was in a strange country and nothing has changed since.



Some St Agnes people

- Paul** 40 years ago a young art teacher came to St Agnes, joined the congregation, was married here and this is where his three children were baptised. He was ordained 22 years ago and served as a teacher worker priest for 20 years. He is temporarily priest-in-charge, having served with 4 previous incumbents and 10 associate priests. He prays that if spared, he might continue here until his funeral!
- Celia** Celia has been at St Agnes for 15 years, as a Church Army Officer, Permanent Deacon and Priest. She has a deep love for the people of St Paul's. An artist, Celia is a Diocesan resource for Personal Growth and Creativity, regularly running workshops and Quiet Days. Celia will be leaving the parish in June 2009.
- Mary** Mary was born in Jamaica. She began to come to St Agnes when a neighbour invited her. Later she got confirmed and began to make time for her church. She is Churchwarden and Deanery Synod representative.
- Errol** Errol came to England from Barbados in 1960. He joined the RAF and, after his demob, came to live in Bristol. He is Churchwarden and Deanery Synod representative.
- Jill** Jill came to live in Bristol in 1993, but continued to work as an Emergency Duty Social Worker in Hackney until 2000. She is a JP, a Governor of St Barnabas School, and an independent panel member hearing school admission and exclusion appeals. She has three wonderful grandchildren. She is Lay Chair of the PCC.
- Margaret** Margaret was born and brought up in St Werburghs, where she was a bell ringer, choir member and Sunday School leader. She was Churchwarden when St Paul's parish was formed. Margaret retired as a Health Service administrator in 1993, was a Governor at St Barnabas School, then Clerk to the Governors for 12 years. She has been Treasurer since 1994 and staffs the church office one morning a week.



Some facts about the parish

Our parish population at the last count was 9583. Bristol City Council provides a range of demographic and socio-economic information. For St Paul's parish, see Ashley Ward: <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Council-Democracy/Statistics-Census-Information/ward-finder.en?XSL=warddetail&WardId=1>

80 people are on our Electoral Roll. This breaks down approximately

Inside parish?	Inside	Outside		
No.	44	36		
Age range	20-40	40-60	60-80	80+
No.	6	19	42	6

Typical Sunday attendance is 80-100, plus about 20 children.

Each year, we have approximately:

Baptisms	30
Weddings	20
Funerals	7 in church (with congregations up to 700)
	8 at the crematorium or for the Local Authority

Other places of worship:

Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Pentecostal (4), Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist. Qu'ranic School & Mosque.

Schools:

Pre-school

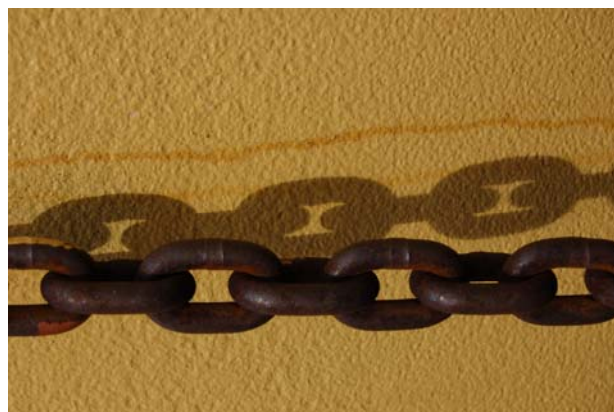
Nursery

Primary

Cabot
Millpond
St Werburgh
St Barnabas C of E VC

Secondary

Fairfield High School
Elmfield School for the Deaf



We look forward to hearing from you!

For further information about our Priest-in-Charge vacancy, please contact Ven. Tim McClure, Archdeacon of Bristol tim.mcclure@bristoldiocese.org

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