

## Case study: St Mary's Church Walton-le-Wolds

St Mary's Church is a pilot to explore how the Festival Church model can work alongside other ways of being church in the Diocese of Leicester.



*Where did they start?*

St Marys' Church, Walton-Le-Wolds was given permission to operate as a Festival Church in 2021. It is one of two churches in the parish along with Holy Trinity, Barrow-Upon-Soar. It is a small rural church in a village of <200 people, the building has no facilities and is not connected to mains water or sewerage. Prior to the pandemic two services were held per month (1 Eucharistic) with an average congregation of 7 including the ministers and organist. They were struggling to meet financial commitments, and complete maintenance and quinquennial works. The congregation were disheartened and struggling to maintain the service pattern. There was very little community engagement and no links with children or schools.

*Why did the PCC consider becoming a Festival church?*

- A growing concern over the future of St Mary's Church as a place of worship, particularly post COVID
- A desire to be community focused and engage more/new people
- The PCC connected to the idea 'doing less, doing it well and doing it with the community'
- There was energy and enthusiasm from local people
- A high degree of local ownership of the building
- Consideration of the role of a Festival Church within the parish to compliment Holy Trinity Church
- The incumbent and Focal Minister were open to change and exploring how *Everyday Faith* can be lived through a Festival Church.

*What are they doing now?*

Since becoming Festival Church, St Mary's has 8 services per year linked to major festivals, including Christmas, Easter, Patronal and Harvest. Each is linked to a community event such as a Christmas Fayre or Harvest Lunch. Congregations now range between 36 and 55, with a significant number of children attending and assisting in leading worship at some services. At other times, members of the congregation attend worship at the other churches in the group and this is promoted in the village. One member of the congregation has now been locally authorised to lead children's activities and all age services, such as the Crib Service.

The local community have become more engaged, with local volunteers supporting church activities, or assisting with maintenance. Groups such as the Women's Institute help decorate the church for festivals or arrange community events. Children and young people are involved in services and activities such as the Christmas Drawing Competition. The building is open at least once a month for quiet prayer and is well attended. There is also a regular community coffee morning each month. A fundraising and events committee has formed with members of the congregation and people from the wider community.

Giving has increased significantly with many of the local community contributing, this means that the church finances are stable, they are able to pay the Parish Contribution and the first stage of Quinquennial works have been completed with fundraising for second stage works well underway. This has included attracting local grants. The fundraising and events committee are looking to the future and an opportunity to re-order with toilets and a servery and increased community space so that the building can be a resource and asset to the local community.

For more information or an informal discussion contact Rev Clive Watts:

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