

Parish Profile

St Paul's Church, Westleigh



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Parish Profile for St Paul's Church Westleigh



1. Introduction:

St Paul's is located in the Parish of Westleigh which forms part of the Leigh Deanery within the Diocese of Manchester. It is virtually half way between the towns of Wigan and Bolton and Leigh itself is located half way between the major cities of Manchester and Liverpool.

St Paul's has been associated with St Peter's, also in Westleigh, with an incumbent leading the two Parishes as a Joint Benefice. Both parishes have separate identities, each with their own Parochial Church Council and facilities, but have forged good links with each other in terms of collaboration and mutual support. A mission partnership between the two Parishes and St Mary the Virgin, Leigh has developed joint initiatives and fostered collective team efforts.

St Paul's Primary School is located close by and the relationship with the School is detailed later in the profile.

The Parish of St Paul's is based around old mining and textile communities but following the demise of these industries new housing developments have attracted an increased residential balance of newcomers to the area with the traditional housing stock being gradually redeveloped. The population of the Parish according to the latest data from the Church Urban Fund is 7,598 but is certainly growing at a fast rate year on year.

The electoral roll for 2023 was made up of 76 members of whom 38 are residents of the Parish. The majority of the 38 non-residents are made up of people who live within close proximity but outside the parish boundary.

We would describe our preferred style of worship as 'moderate catholic'. We believe that our worship should be varied and inclusive and so be able to meet the needs of as many parishioners as possible.

2. The Church in the Parish:

The Church building was first consecrated in 1847 and to this day still retains the great character that our predecessors envisaged. It has been a much loved building and maintained to a very high standard with a management strategy in place to ensure that the fabric of the building has a regular repair and renewal programme.

The last Quinquennial inspection was undertaken in 2022 with several low grade items dealt with accordingly. The next inspection will come in the middle of 2027.

A new central heating system has been successfully installed along with security measures to protect the exterior of the original traditional stained glass windows.

The Vicarage sited close to St Peter's is operated on a shared cost basis between the two Churches.

There are no other buildings belonging to the Parish so events take place within the Church building where a pew relocation system is in place to maximise space as required but allowing us to return the seating afterwards. Larger events take place in other local venues.



Our Church School located a half mile from the church is fully maintained by the school and creates no additional liabilities for the PCC. The use of the School Hall for special events and organisations is accepted practice and done through a letting arrangement with the school.

The PCC consists of a good mix of skills and talents led by experienced wardens and officers which provides the clergy with good support on all matters. Church Wardens are elected along with Secretary, Treasurer and Independent Examiner at the annual PCC meeting open to the public. A Steering Committee ensures that the PCC agendas are focused and relevant.

The finances are good if a little tight at times and our Parish Share obligation, which we take most seriously, is paid in full each year with the exception of 2020 due to the fundraising restrictions created by the Coronavirus legislation and social distancing. Despite this our financial support to the Diocese always remains our priority. No long term financial liabilities are in place and a consistent Stewardship Scheme/Gift Aid support is provided by Parishioners.

3. The Parish and the Community:

St Paul's has one service on a Sunday:

Sunday 10.45am Family Sung Eucharist

The family of St Paul's is much greater than its Sunday morning attendance at worship. Although not regular Sunday morning attenders, many of the people in the parish see themselves as belonging to St Paul's as evidenced by the large number of pastoral offices, particularly baptisms and funerals, but increasingly weddings. We see families returning time and again at different life stages.

Once a month there is an "All age worship" service as part of the Sunday morning service which is aimed at attracting younger families to participate in a more informal presentation.

Each year we undertake a Procession of Witness around the parish with a full brass band accompaniment, an occasion when the streets of Westleigh come alive with walkers and well-wishers, undertaken by not just the regular congregation but with our organisations, confirmation candidates and our primary school children. A Bishop of Manchester has even been seen walking with us on the odd occasion as well as Brian the dog!!.



We have a robed choir for all sung services and at the end of the 10.45am family service on Sundays we have a post service coffee and fellowship gathering supplied and catered for by the congregation.

The congregation work tirelessly on fundraising events – Christmas Fairs, Strawberry Teas, Soup and Sandwich afternoons, all of which are widely supported by the local community. Our annual Christmas Fair is our main fundraising event, and is an afternoon of great fellowship and cements relationships with the people of the Parish.

These efforts also help us contribute to the charities we support – Christian Aid and The Children’s Society, Foodbanks and Shelters. We have also supported the Olive Tree Project in Bethlehem.

At Harvest Festival we annually donate a large amount of produce collected from our Sunday congregation and from our school families which have been donated to Leigh and Atherton Foodbank. We also support the Railway Road Assisted Housing Project for single homeless people.



We have a high achieving and thriving primary school where our former Vicar took Collective Worship and School Eucharist’s. Members of the clergy team also put on a “Eucharist Journey” event staffed by members of the congregation and attended by KS2 children. This was an invitation to confirmation. It was an initiative run in conjunction with our Benefice Church of St Peter with whom we hold joint Confirmation services each year. St Paul’s School Christ Club was established for younger children who express interest in Bible study and this we see as another mission based initiative through this strong relationship with the School.

The Governing Body of the School comprises a majority of PCC Foundation Governors heavily committed to providing high quality education for each child in their care within a safe environment and a faith based policy to provide opportunities for children’s personal development.

We were recently invited to take part in a Spring Community Event instigated by and held on the campus of the school. Through the enthusiasm of our clergy and parishioners staffing the event for St Paul's we were able to strengthen our relationship with the School which has a cohort of approximately 1,000 pupils. This led to members of our congregation forming a Reading Support Scheme at the school and as a consequence of this more young people came into church on a regular basis to read and to lead intercessions at our All Age Service.



We also had a very successful event to commemorate the centenary of the end of WW1 in which the Westleigh School children took part and we are extremely excited about the prospect of exploring further links with Church and School.

The PCC increasingly see themselves as a missional community seeking to reach out and work alongside the local community. According to data from the Church Urban Fund St Paul's Parish is amongst the most deprived in the country. It ranks 587 out of 12,382 where 1 is the most deprived. (This takes into account factors such as unemployment, child poverty, working age poverty, pensioner poverty, social housing, lone parenthood, people living alone, ethnic diversity etc.).

The Parish has been particularly affected by years of cuts from central and local government services and the Church reaches out to those less fortunate to help them through their personal difficulties. Several care homes for the elderly fall within the boundaries of the Parish and developed links to these establishments need to be extended.



4. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths:

- Warm & Welcoming
- Active and committed PCC & Officers
- Excellent Fundraising abilities
- Community support for life events
- Excellent relationship with St Paul's School
- Good financial position

Opportunities:

- Local outreach – New Homes development
- High School outreach
- Residential Care Homes in Parish
- Ecumenical – no other churches of any denomination within the parish
- Parish Newsletter/Magazine reinstatement
- Diocesan Mission Communities initiative

Weaknesses:

- Aging congregation
- Young Adults
- Few Parish clubs/associations
- Technology skills – no leaders
- No Parish buildings for events
- Unable to grow congregation

Threats:

- Social apathy towards religion
- Alternative interests for young people – social media etc
- Lack of leaders to promote outreach
- Future Finance post Corona virus pandemic
- Reduction in Clergy

5. Mission and Development potential:

We believe that there is great scope and many opportunities to be grasped to increase and extend mission and a lot of work has been put in place within the Parish to encourage and embrace further development. Under good leadership there is so much more to be achieved specifically:

- A more proactive approach to the further relationship with Westleigh School.
- Closer Links with local Care Homes.
- The Diocesan reorganisation at Deanery Level and the Mission Communities initiative will give us great opportunity to develop further ministry outreach with the additional collaborative support that these new developments will provide.
- Currently under construction is a major housing development that will see around 1,000 new homes built within a mile or so of St Paul's church. This will create a significant opportunity for mission development for us and one that we are keen to explore with the right support.



6. The Priest we are looking for

We are looking for a priest who will be sympathetic to our Eucharistic based services; who will be among us and work with us; who has the organisational skills, creativity and energy to lead and guide us in our continued development whilst maintaining our traditions.

We would also hope that candidates would meet the following criteria:

- Strong personal faith and leadership skills
- Be approachable
- Willing to participate in all aspects of church life
- A desire to be involved on and engage with the school governing body
- Provide weekly assembly leadership in school
- Able to provide continuous improvement in mission □ Ability to engage with the wider community