Parish Profile St Francis Strood

Incumbent: Rev. Sharon Copestake

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Setting

The parish of St Francis in Strood is bordered by the River Medway, the M2 motorway and the old A2 main road. Predominately housing, some 15,000 people live within the parish and more development is expected within the next 3-5 years raising the levels to perhaps 18,000.

Although the parish is home to an out of town retail leisure area (Medway Valley Park), which includes a private gym, Premier Inn, Cineworld multiplex cinema and a number of chain restaurants, the main users of these facilities travel from a wide geography.
The parish is part of the Medway Towns and includes some of the most deprived areas in the South East. This shows the parish boundary (blue line), and the church is marked with a +. The dark brown areas are deemed ‘most deprived’ and so it is apparent that there is significant deprivation within the parish. The pale yellow is undeveloped space as Strood sits on the edge of the Medway Towns.

Issues in the area include high levels of social isolation, high numbers of people with disabilities and unable to work, disproportionate elderly and childhood poverty levels.

The Medway Town is well served with shopping facilities, and Bluewater is not far, although again less frequented by parishioners than the town centre of Strood. Buses are limited and many people feel isolated locally.

The church

St Francis Church was built in 1960 in response to the growing population, with a vision to serve that growth offering a place of hospitality and a place where life in all its fulness can be found. The housing is all built post WWII (around 6,500 dwellings).

The church has a broad tradition, but probably settles as being open evangelical and relatively charismatic. Our strapline is: Real Faith, Real Lives, Real People.

Sunday morning is the focus for worship (10am). There is Holy Communion weekly (and a Sunday school that meets as part of the worship) and on the 2nd Sunday each month the main worship is all ages together and is a service of the word, with a free breakfast beforehand (and an 8am BCP service). Current USA is 48, ER just under 50.
In addition there are two monthly services: *Belong* for adults with learning difficulties, and *Encounter* a charismatic praise service.

Hospitality underpins the activities of St Francis. We offer A Place of Welcome on a Tuesday morning.

There are two parent and toddler groups (both less than a year old) – Funky Fridays (which has a usual attendance of around 35 children) and AllSorts run by HomeStart which has between 6 and 10 families weekly. Both these groups are growing.
Ministry is supported by a shared Pioneer Minister that works over 3 parishes and focuses her work upon the 4 schools in the parish (non CofE schools). This includes weekly assemblies, school visits and class interaction from time to time.

We have four house groups running, and regularly offer other groups to discuss seasonal or topical issues. For example, recently a series of lunchtime sessions were run covering some difficult questions (using the Church Army resource Why on Earth...?).

As well as the incumbent, there is a training curate, a Reader and a voluntary music leader. The leadership team also includes a lay person with a licence to preach. Some three people are exploring ordained ministry with the DDO.

Morning Prayer is said in church on a Tuesday and with colleagues across Strood on a Thursday (venue changes). In addition there are monthly prayers with ecumenical partners.

There are between 8 and 10 baptisms each year, around 15-20 funerals taken by clergy each year (perhaps 4 or 5 in church), and weddings are not common place. There was 1 wedding in 2018, and have been none to date this year.
Key Projects and activities

We regularly run Games Nights, quizzes and other events: fun, family and fellowship is important. These attract somewhere between 15 and 30 people, and quizzes are normally a sell out of 10 or so teams of 6.

We have run several very successful campaigns to link the church and our faith with those in the community. The St Francis Rocks! Campaign was very successful in 2017, as has been the annual Christmas Jumper Sunday event.
St Francis was the initial driving partner of the now ceased Strood Community Project that ran for over 10 years. One of the legacies that has been shaped and extended has been the Christmas Hamper Project which provides Christmas treats and gifts to some 60-70 households in the parish. This project gains momentum each year, and is carried out with key partners in Weald (Sevenoaks) with contributions from Rochester cathedral and other local churches with referrals from local schools and others.

Social media has considerable impact locally and we use facebook to publicise all our activities. We have just received funding to equip a website and that is under construction, but in the meantime we try and use the rather cumbersome acurchnearyou.com, although get few enquiries through it.
Church Hall

The Church Hall is used by a St Francis Pre School each day all day. This was originally a church playgroup over 40 years ago but is now an independent preschool that hires the venue. The hall is rented every week day evening by different groups including uniformed groups and a local karate group.

Due to the lack of available volunteers to clean and lock up the PCC took the decision around 2 years ago to stop casual lets, although this is under constant review.

The Parish Vision

We seek to create and grow disciples of Jesus so that together we build the Kingdom of God in South Strood.

- We believe that God is at work transforming lives and communities through the power of his Holy Spirit.

- We are committed to **Real Faith, Real Lives, Real People**.

- We are all about bringing the Good News of Jesus to everyone, sharing together, and seeking God in all we do so that, empowered by the Spirit, together we will work to build the Kingdom of God here in our lifetime.

**Real Faith**: trusting in God, empowered by the Holy Spirit  
*We are committed to seeking God first in all that we do. We hope for a community where everyone is equipped to pursue a life in the Spirit. We long to see people come to discover a real faith in Jesus.***

**Real Lives**: renewed lives that we share with one another  
*We are committed to sharing life’s journey with one another, seeking renewal, forgiving and being forgiven. We seek to practise hospitality with everyone in the same way that God offers to us. God has a special heart for the poor and marginalised, and so we work for justice in our lives and in our world.***

**Real People**: bringing the Good News of the Kingdom of God to everyone  
*We desire to see South Strood transformed by the news of God’s Kingdom. We believe that having fun together is a serious part of being a follower of Jesus. We value authenticity as a mark of God’s Kingdom on earth.***