

Does Northop Hall need St Mary's Church?



Information, a survey
and an invitation from members
of our village Anglican Church

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We are the congregation of St Mary's, Northop Hall. We love our church community and building and are proud to have been able to maintain it for the village over the years. However, of late we have been having to ask painful and difficult questions about the future of the building. We have rejoiced in recent years to welcome new members into the church, and to build better links with the school, the scouts and others, and yet we are increasingly, on average, few in number, older and more frail, and a number of very faithful members are no longer able to join us so regularly. We are grateful too for those who do not attend but support the church financially and in their prayers.

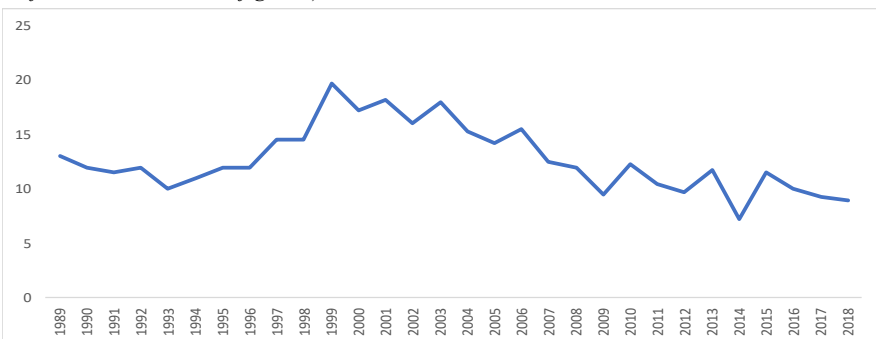
National statistics show that the percentage of people identifying as Christians is sharply falling and our own statistics (see below) suggest that what we are currently offering is not what the village needs. Therefore we are contacting all the homes in Northop Hall to seek your views and invite your response as we try to make decisions for the future.

We think it is best that we are honest with you as local residents about the situation, and likewise we would very much appreciate your replies, whatever your views.



Average Sunday attendance

(Typical Sundays in Ordinary Time - note that these figures include 1 or 2 clergy, the organist and 2 members who live outside the village. The number of village residents attending is therefore 4 less than these figures.)



How do you respond?

Perhaps you do not mind whether St Mary's stays open or not, or maybe the thought of it closing saddens you but there is nothing you feel that you can do about it? Or maybe you feel that it is a relic of a past age, or that Christianity is an unhealthy and unwelcome influence, and you would be pleased to see the church close? In which case, please do do us the kindness of telling us. It will make it easier for us to lay down a burden, that is getting difficult to manage, with less of a feeling of guilt, if it comes to that.

On the other hand you may feel that there would be a future for the church if we did things differently? Perhaps you would be more likely to come and join us if we worshiped on a different day or time, or in a very different style? There is no need for services necessarily to be traditional hymn, liturgy and sermon affairs. Maybe there is a more creative way that would could come together to reflect or pray or worship or learn from each other?

Maybe you could find alternative and additional uses for the building that would give it more of a reason to exist?

We are open to all suggestions and would love to have a conversation with anyone who has any constructive ideas.

Or perhaps you have wondered about going to church, or coming back to church, but for one reason or another you haven't before now? We would love to see you and you would be very very welcome, whoever you are, just as you are. We like to think that we are not too weird or scary when you get to know us!

Whatever your view, please do complete the enclosed questionnaire, or fill it in online at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GS8725S> (You can find links on our website and Facebook page.)

We would stress that all existing bookings for weddings and baptisms in the church will be honoured and that the church is unlikely to close in 2018.

Use of the church for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

These are the numbers of each type of service held in St Mary's each year.

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Weddings	0	0	3	3	2	1	4	2	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	1
Baptisms	5	3	8	7	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	5	6	4
Funerals	1	1	5	3	1	4	4	2	3	2	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	5	2	2

Our records suggest that people from Northop Hall are as likely to choose Northop Church as St Mary's to mark significant moments in their lives. Does this mean that Northop Church could be sufficient to function as the Anglican Church for Northop Hall, as it does for Sychdyn?

Supporting the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches

Our villages are blessed to have two very good churches in other Christian traditions. Both congregations play a valuable role in village life and we respect what they do. The last thing we would want is to divide loyalties. So if you already support one of them, please do not be tempted to also try to offer support to us as well. We do not want resources to be spread even more thinly, potentially threatening their future as well. We will certainly not start any new initiatives that would compete with what they offer. We believe that we are brothers and sisters together as Christians and not in any way in competition. If the best thing for us to do is to lend our support to these congregations, perhaps that is what we should do? Maybe the village does not need three churches any more?

This is not a request for money! So please don't send money at this time. Finance is only a symptom of the larger problem. We would feel bad about accepting donations should the church then need to close. The first question is whether the church has a future. After that we can look at how that future is resourced. If you would wish to be part of this support in the future, please let us know.

What are the options?

We would love to see any of the following happen (or something we have not thought of!):

The church could be used for other activities. The building is largely sound, if a little cold and leaky, but currently we have no kitchen or toilets and we would not want to do anything that would harm the Pavillion or other churches which hire out space, so would need to be convinced that there is additional need.

Our regular Sunday morning service at 9:30am could find a new lease of life with new members joining us. We would love to see you.

We could find alternative ways of worshipping or exploring Christian faith at different days and times. This would be very exciting.

What are NOT options.

Staying as we are, until fewer and fewer people are able to take part and the building slowly decays, while expecting other people to pay for it.

Looking for a solution from outside the village - people often think that 'the Church' is very wealthy and is sitting on large piles of money, or that we are funded by the government, neither of which is true. Additionally, other local churches have their own challenges and cannot be expected to continue subsidising Northop Hall forever.

Similarly, there is no outside threat to St Mary's. We are not being closed down by the Diocese or the Bishop or anybody else. This is our church and it is for those who attend and the wider village community to either make this work, or to gently let go.