

St Michael's is the ancient Church of England Parish Church at the centre of Bishop's Stortford.

Our community ranges in age from 0-90+ and has become increasingly multi-national. But regular, committed attendance at worship, and involvement in our church activities, is skewed towards the older, white section of our congregation. We welcome the opportunity to diversify the age range in all of our worship and are keen to pursue opportunities in that direction. Like many churches over recent decades, changes in social attitudes and weekend activities have accompanied a decline in the numbers of younger people attending worship.

Most of our services are Holy Communion, often with choral music from the Choir. We sing from the *Ancient and Modern* hymnbook. We also have monthly All-Age services of an informal nature, and occasional special services e.g. Taizé. Sunday mornings are the main gathering of our church community, but Wednesdays are important too, with a morning Communion followed by our Tiny-Tots pre-schoolers service.

Across all our services, a usual week might see 150 adults and 30 under-16s attending St Michael's. Most of the under-16s will be under 8 years of age, but a number of older children and teenagers attend, regularly or intermittently. We are eager to more effectively engage with *all* members of our parish to boost the number of young people and families attending the various services we provide, and to boost the commitment of those we reach by developing an even broader outlook of this kind.

We're a varied congregation with some traditional members who appreciate church life as it currently exists, and some who welcome the change that comes from life in the Holy Spirit. Prayer and Bible study are important to many in our congregation. Social action and charity galvanise others. Pastoral care and outreach, within the congregation, and reaching out into the community, especially areas of new housing, also inspire a good number of us. We try very hard to be welcoming, loving and united as a congregation, and many value the sense of belonging found here. Going forward we are keen to provide more opportunities for younger people and families to engage in, commit to and support church life, while being careful to continue providing for the needs of existing church members.

As well as our more regular members, we relate to many people in the town more obliquely. We have many occasional worshipers who come at festivals, or intermittently. We have links with many schools in Bishop's Stortford, and a close and creative relationship with our St Michael's Church School. Frequently the church is used for civic services and memorial services for people from the community. It is our hope that these school and community links might bear even more fruit in the future through a positive attitude to engaging the people encountered via these opportunities.

We have much scope for outreach to families, and already endeavour to do much in this area. But we feel that there is plenty of room for this aspect of our ministry to grow, and a feeling has been developing that we should be concentrating more of our prayers, resources and time to develop this.