



# ST MARY MAGDALENE, GREAT HAMPDEN

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## WELCOME AND WORSHIP

In 2019 the Project Vision Statement described the three key aims of the project in this way:

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*To secure the future we wish to release the potential of the building in ways that will:*

- 1. Create an accessible, attractive worship space in the chancel for the average congregation size of 20-30.*
  - 2. Create an exciting performance space.*
  - 3. Allow us to develop the church as a place of pilgrimage, spirituality, retreat and education.*
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This was agreed by the PCC and shared with the congregation in 2019.

This first goal comes from a desire to foster a sense of connection and togetherness in our worship. In a church the size of ours it is easy to feel disconnected and separated when we are just a few people in a building designed to hold many more.

There is research and data that suggests that when we create a more intimate worship space spirituality and mission increase<sup>1</sup>. Our sense of togetherness, being a Christian community, a congregation, united in prayer and worship of the God who brings us together grows when we worship in a way that allows us to sense and experience that togetherness.

This understanding was built in part on the renewed sense of community created by the successful relocation of Holy Communion to the Lady Chapel. This was a controversial change resisted by some

when it was introduced, but by 2023 we were spilling out of the Lady Chapel.

For those heavily involved in the day-to-day management of the project achieving this key goal was a driver of decision making. But the implementation of this goal was not well communicated to the congregation on our return to church. The rationale was not reshared and it has come as a shock to some.

In light of this the PCC has committed to working together to find the best way of worshipping in the new space.

To that end we quickly arranged a '**Welcome and Worship Workshop**' for the PCC, facilitated by Asa Humphries, the Parish Development Advisor.

Some of the ideas that came out of that were:

- To explore seeing our church, which is largely a gathered community, as a '**Cathedral for the Chilterns**'.  
In the church there is an Ordnance Survey map that shows the church at its centre.  
It is an enlightening way to view our community, because it graphically illustrates how our location, which we used to view as a weakness, is in fact a great strength. This realisation was a key outcome of the Vision Setting exercise that guided the project aims.
- To consider **creating an aural history** of both the fabric of the church and individual's memories, particularly of 'their seat', available to visitors and as a piece of living history.
- Consider ways of having the **church open more** frequently and **pro-actively engaging with walkers**.
- **Visit a cathedral** to understand how their worship style, mission and ministry might work in our context.

Since we returned to the building we have made some initial changes to our seating arrangements, most notably by **returning BCP Mattins to take place in the nave**.

The rationale for this is both practical—this service requires a prayer book, a hymn book and the Weekly Herald, and theological—BCP spirituality is more personal and individual, requires less interaction (no peace, for instance), encourages kneeling and has been the way it is for centuries. It is our most common service.

We have also encouraged people who wish to do so to sit in the front right pew of the nave, which sits forwards of the main block of seating.

At the PCC meeting on April 7th we committed to making the period between **April-September** one of **experimentation**, where we get to know the capabilities of the chancel as a worshipping space by trying different layouts and getting feedback.

We agreed that in September we will ask people to vote on what layout they most prefer for our service types (as a secret ballot that we will ask the Area Dean to count!). This would be advisory, as it is always the responsibility of the PCC to make decisions about worship.

Some of the ways we might experiment in the chancel are:

- To try **different arrangements of chairs** and the two choir stalls to shape seating configurations.
- Experiment with the **semi-circle** between the front right nave pew and the Rector's stall to increase seating space.
- Think through options like **turning East for the Creed**.
- Make sure some of the new **chairs have arms**.

Other possibilities may well occur to us as we experiment. The key is to keep an open mind and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in our worship and our experimentation. Sometimes (as we found when we moved to the Lady Chapel for Communion), it takes a bit of time to get used to something new—but before long it becomes part of our tradition.

We have also thought about some other ways to improve our welcome:

- Make sure Orders of Service/Heralds are delivered to church before Sunday morning, to help the set up and welcome.
- Trial Seasonal Orders of Service for Morning Prayer.

So we know what to expect, here is a list of the services planned between now and August with congregational location

13-Apr-25	Palm Sunday	MP	Chancel
18-Apr-25	Good Friday	Seven Last Words	Nave
20-Apr-25	Easter Day	Family Festival Communion	Nave
27-Apr-25	Easter 2	BCP	Nave
04-May-25	Easter 3	BCP	Nave
11-May-25	Easter 4	MP	Chancel
18-May-25	Easter 5	Communion	Chancel
25-May-25	Easter 6	BCP	Nave
01-Jun-25	Easter 7	BCP	Nave
08-Jun-25	Pentecost	MP	Chancel
	Patronal Festival		
15-Jun-25	(Trinity sunday)	No service	
22-Jun-25	Trinity 1	JH Soc Memorial BCP	Nave
29-Jun-25	Trinity 2	Communion	Chancel
06-Jul-25	Trinity 3	MP	Chancel
13-Jul-25	Trinity 4	BCP	Nave
	Patronal Festival		
20-Jul-25	(Mary Magdalene)	Communion	Nave
27-Jul-25	Trinity 6	BCP	Nave

You can see that of the 16 services six are planned to take place in the chancel and ten are planned to take place in the nave.

We can decide how we experiment in what are usually less well-attended services in August nearer the time.

We value everyone’s thoughts and feedback as we look to the future of our church—not just what we like, but what gives our church the best future.

Jesus said, **“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”** (Matthew 18.25). We want our worship to truly reflect our togetherness and God’s presence with us.

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<sup>i</sup> For instance ‘Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-Ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission’, 1999, Richard Giles Liturgical Press.