

Interim Vicar, St James Silsden Bishop's Statement

Our vision in the Diocese of Leeds is about confident clergy equipping confident Christians to live and tell the good news of Jesus Christ. In appointing to every post, we seek people who have a joyful and confident faith which has inspired a track record of church growth, both numerically and spiritually.

St James Silsden is a large single-church small town parish with a “village” feel to the west of Keighley and Bradford. Silsden lies on the Leeds-Liverpool canal and was originally a mill village with a non-conformist Methodist heritage. That industry has long since gone, and the parish has lower than average levels of deprivation. Around 80% of housing is owner-occupied, with an above average proportion being terraced. The population in 2021 was 8707, but this will have increased considerably through subsequent new housing developments, which are continuing to add to the town. The population is almost entirely white British, and income along with levels of education and qualifications are above regional averages. The health, wholesale and construction sectors are significant sources of employment, along with some farming, and the local railway station offers easy commutes into Leeds or Bradford. The church buildings are at the heart of the town, on the high street which has a variety of pubs, cafes and small shops.

The parish has recently become vacant after a faithful ministry of 13 years from the previous clergy (a husband and wife job-share). Important building blocks are in place in terms of engagement with the community, regular Alpha courses, a range of worship service styles, good governance structures and development of the church buildings. Lay ministry has been carefully nurtured, with increased confidence and a growing leadership pipeline.

A recent initiative has started to engage those living in the new housing developments. How to build on this is one of the important questions that must be addressed. Another is how to build greater financial strength so that the parish does not require external subsidy. The answers to these questions may require significant further changes, which need to be carefully managed. That is why, following the appropriate and necessary consultations locally and within the Diocese, an Interim Ministry appointment is being progressed for an initial period of three years. This will allow the space and time to focus on these and other questions and to carefully manage such change as is needed.

From the perspective of the Episcopal Area, we see three particular specific tasks for the Interim Ministry beyond the normal demands of parish ministry:

1. To develop and implement a plan for mission amongst the people living and moving into the new housing developments in the parish;
2. To determine whether the parish's finances can be built up sufficiently to sustain the deployment of a full-time vicar in future;
3. To help the parish develop and articulate its identity, so it is clear what kind of skills and experience they are seeking in the next incumbent at the end of the Interim Ministry.

In common with all our Interim Ministry appointments, a monitoring process will be put in place, involving a quarterly meeting with the Archdeacon and a review point at the end of two years at the latest. This will enable a decision to be taken as to whether the arrangement should be extended, made permanent or the appointment reviewed and changed. This will allow the decision to be implemented during the third year of the interim post. The criteria for the review would be based on the three key tasks listed above.

In addition to the Interim Ministry tasks, we would also expect the Interim Vicar to continue the development of the life of the church and its place in the local community. As with most of our appointments, these priorities are:

- To sustain and develop a 'mixed ecology' of effective forms of mission, ministry and styles of worship, and especially those enabling outreach to families, young people and children in order to grow young people as Christians.
- To continue building up confident lay ministry, both in depth and numbers. This will include developing pathways for evangelism and discipleship, including the existing home groups, and increased lay leadership, encouraging individuals to grow in faith and use their gifts and talents. Hence, the incoming vicar will need excellent teaching, communication, team building and team leadership skills.
- To strengthen, and further develop, active and visible relationships within Silsden in creative ways, both personally as an individual and also through the congregation. S(he) should be able to engage strategically with the life of the community, fostering excellent relationships (for example) with the local primary school, other churches involved in Churches Together in Silsden, uniformed groups and community organisations (not least through the Gala). We expect him/her to build on the work to date so that St James contributes with others to a shared vision both for Silsden, and for the place of the churches in Silsden.

The Deanery of South Craven and Wharfedale is comprised of parishes with a similar demographic to Silsden, many of whom are experimenting with mixing new approaches to worship and mission alongside inherited patterns. The new Interim Vicar will therefore find a group of creative and supportive colleagues in the Deanery chapter, all of whom will be deeply familiar with the joys and challenges that each other faces. There is also a learning community of Interim Ministers in the Diocese, convened by an Archdeacon, to which the Interim Vicar will be welcome. We expect the new post holder to work with a spirit of generosity in sharing wisdom and insights about ministry within the Deanery of South Craven and Wharfedale and across the Episcopal Area.

+Toby Bradford
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