



St Mary's Church, Thorpe

Church Approach, Egham, Surrey, TW20 8TO

Vicar: The Revd. Damian Stewart Harrison-Miles, BTh
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Damian Harrison-Miles - Vicar of Thorpe

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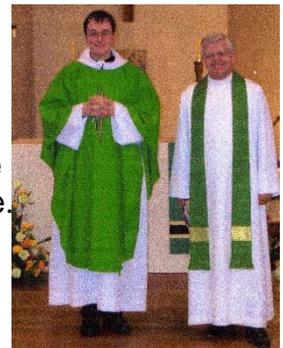
Who I am and how did I end up a Vicar?

I was born in Leeds, Yorkshire but grew up in Hastings, East Sussex where my family attended Christchurch St Leonards (affectionately known as the Cathedral of the South Coast). After attending Bexhill High School and Bexhill College I spent a year at Huddersfield University studying food and catering management before taking a post with the Child Support Agency where I became a Civil Servant (Executive Officer) and staff counsellor. I was blessed to worship at St John's Upper St Leonards, with great encouragement to foster my vocation from Jeff Hopkin Williams – now Vicar of St Mary's Twickenham. Following a selection conference in 1998 I read Theology at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge / Westcott House, and graduated with a BTh (2:1) in June 2002.



I was made Deacon in Chichester Cathedral on Sunday 28th June 2002 by Bishop John Hind and served my curacy at St Mary the Virgin Willingdon for 4 years with the brilliant (and late) Martin Onions and blessed to minister alongside and learn from the lovely David Wilcox, former Bishop of Dorking, who had recently retired to Willingdon and is a great inspiration. I was ordained priest at St Andrew's Church Eastbourne on Sunday 29th June 2003 by Bishop Wallace Benn and served as his interim chaplain from February to October of the same year. In 2006 I was appointed Priest in Charge of St Paul, Nork in Epsom Deanery, where I had a busy and happy 4 years. At Nork I began work as a local vocations advisor for Guildford

Diocese, helping people take their first steps towards ordination, then in 2010 the Holy Spirit (and the then Bishop of Guildford) prompted me to think about a move.



Thorpe – a wonderful home for 9 years... so far...!

At Candlemas 2011, I was licensed as Priest in Charge here at beautiful St Mary's Church, Thorpe in Runnymede Deanery. And there have been many challenges to overcome, significant fundraising, to overseeing building works including new church heating and LED lighting, re-pointing many sections of the Medieval walls, refurbishment of the halls complex and even installing an additional 4 bells in celebration of Magna Carta 800. (We are presently working on a footpaths and patio project to improve the outdoor realm and create safe spaces for socially distanced activities!) A top priority has been to grow our congregation, introducing worship for all ages and renewing community relationships. In June 2015 I was Inducted as Vicar of Thorpe by the Bishop of Guildford.

As part of a brilliant team we financed and built a Church Primary School (Where I have served as deputy chair of governors until this September) and I also became a Training Incumbent, first seeing Gerard through his STETS training at Salisbury before he stayed with us as assistant curate and then Jo was made deacon in July 2019 and joined the team.



I live with my partner and our daughter at St Mary's Vicarage, just next door to the Medieval Church and enjoy many hobbies. Among them, we have a large garden and part is dedicated to growing vegetables. This year I have enjoyed the fruits of my labour including potatoes, beans, spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, peppers and much more. During lock-down I allowed the grass to grow and following a gift from a parishioner, sowed wildflowers, cutting a path in the meadow to create a long and winding butterfly walk for our daughter, which she absolutely loved. I am passionate about our environment and champion recycling, and I wish to see a significant reduction in plastic waste. Like many, I loved the air quality and quiet above Thorpe during lock-down and would like our next car to be a hybrid, if not all electric (we are saving up!)



I am also the Rector of the Society of Catholic Priests (SCP) for the Diocese of Guildford, a growing society of women and men serving as priests, deacons, and consecrated religious throughout the Anglican Communion. The Society aims to promote priestly spirituality and catholic evangelism which is very much at the heart of my call as a priest in God's Church. I am also a long-standing member of the Unite Union and encourage all clergy to join!



The Church in a changing world, Covid-19

I am also deeply concerned by the challenges that many people are facing at this time. Covid has shaken our world and nothing feels quite the same, with large numbers of people disaffected and some struggling with their mental and physical health, all attributable to this virus and its consequences. I recognise that we must all learn to live with this new threat to our health and well-being, which means finding a new normal, and this is where we, the Church of today have such an important role to play in communities like Thorpe. Our churches, like St Mary's are on the front line and I couldn't be prouder of the hard work and dedication of so many in this community and not simply our many key-workers, but many more who have looked after neighbours with shopping and prescriptions, helped friends, family and strangers alike, volunteering in the Foodbank and many other ways. The people of Thorpe, indeed the UK are just brilliant.

Now we need to learn from this experience and keep community relationships thriving, and at St Mary's we are seeking to re-build our worshipping life, bringing as many people as possible safely back into church while maintaining and growing our online offerings and community outreach as we strive to meet people where they are, increasingly through social media. I am also working to bring counselling services back into our Rutherwyke Room (Church Hall) as soon as possible, and even launch a new youth group this Autumn! I am by nature a moderate. I believe that people, lay and ordained of all ages and traditions should play an active part in the life of St Mary's Church, Thorpe and that we should be inclusive of all, as one family of faith. So, if you are reading this and asking what St Mary's is about, the answer to that question is simple: we are about you, and your relationship with God and helping that to grow, along with your friendships with others, because ***there is always a welcome for all at St Mary's Church, Thorpe.***

Please feel able to contact me:

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Or visit St Mary's Facebook Page for lots more about us:

<https://www.facebook.com/StMarysChurchThorpe>

