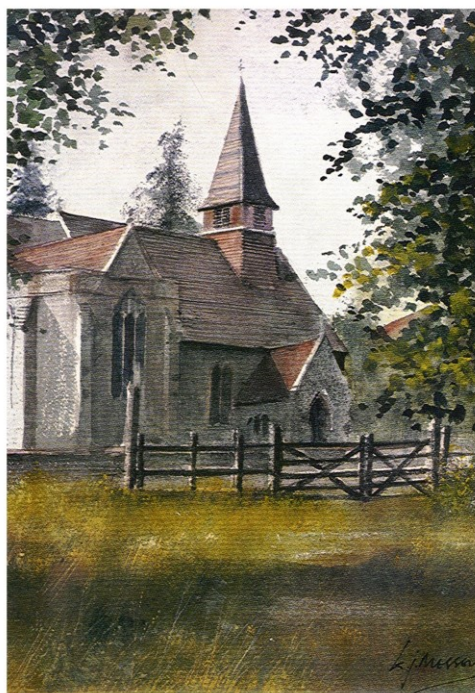


THE CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS
ROTHERFIELD GREYS
HENLEY ON THAMES
OXFORDSHIRE RG9 4QB



DEANERY OF HENLEY ON THAMES
DIOCESE OF OXFORD

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
FOR YEAR ENDING
31 DECEMBER 2022

ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH sits beside the village pub in Rotherfield Greys where its ecclesiastical boundary spirals out past two village greens, a small hamlet, several country lanes to the west, winding past a National Trust property and eight farms to its ultimate south eastern edge, which overlaps with the civil town boundary of Henley, where a 1960's development provides half of our potential parishioners. A truly eclectic mix and one which gives this Parish its particular character.

Historically it was its own parish, with the responsibility of Highmoor and the giving of Highmoor and Holy Trinity, Henley. A second pastoral reorganisation in 2002 saw us joined to the Nettlebed Benefice (having previously been paired with Rotherfield Peppard when Highmoor was removed from Greys).

There is benefit from being part of the wider Benefice.

THE WORK OF THE PCC

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of the Church of St Nicholas has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, associate priest and visiting priests in promoting the pastoral, spiritual, social and ecumenical mission of the church within the ecclesiastical parish. The PCC also has responsibility for the maintenance of the fabric of the Church of St Nicholas. The Church is generally opened daily to enable worship and to allow the many visitors a chance to experience our historic building but during the pandemic had to abide with government and Church regulations so was closed for some part of the year.

Membership

Members of the PCC are either elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, held in accordance with the Church Representation Rules, or are members by virtue of their office. The PCC is a charity exempt from registration with the Charity Commission and its registration number for re-claiming Income Tax under Gift Aid and Deeds of Covenant is X93072.

During 2020 the people listed below served as members of the PCC

		Date of appointment/ Sidesmen on three year rotation	Due for re-election
Priest in Charge	Rev Mark Ainsworth	From 4 June 2019	
House for Duty Priest		Vacant from October 2016	
Director of Music	Nicholas Bliss - position now vacant	appointed 2021: resigned 2022	
Keeper of the Church	Mrs. Gillian Ovey	From October 2020	2023
Elected Officers	Mr Paul Fairweather	Treasurer	At Annual Meeting
	Mrs Alex Bloodworth	Secretary	At Annual Meeting
Deanery Synod (2)	Mr. Tom Geake	From October 2020	2023
Lay Members (6)	Mrs Sue Samuels	From 2020	2023
	Mr Nigel Dennis	From 2021	2024
	Mr Richard Ovey	From 2022	2025
	Mr. Robert Barrett	+ 11/08/22	2023
	Mrs Anne Robertson was co-opted to replace RB	From 2022	2025

The PCC meets five times a year, now on the third Wednesday of the month with the Annual Meeting of the church held in March or April. The PCC also operates through standing committees which report to the full PCC meetings and is also represented at the Joint Benefice Meetings.

THE REV MARK AINSWORTH – is Priest in Charge of the Benefice of Nettlebed and Greys and Nuffield. It has been another complicated year due to the Pandemic. The PIC's report detailing how the Benefice managed during 2022 is below.

2022 PRIEST IN CHARGE ANNUAL REPORT

I remain grateful to minister in these two Benefices comprising five parishes, and especially for the help and support of the Churchwardens, PCCs and laity. As in previous years, the faithful ministry of the Rev. Keith Knee-Robinson and the Rev. Ian Thacker assisting from time to time has meant that I have not felt quite so alone as a priest. Towards the end of the year, the Rev. Andrew Petit (who moved to Nettlebed with his wife Lynda) started also to assist; and I am grateful for his presence and help.

Because the four parishes of the Benefice of Nettlebed form a united Benefice there is not a legal requirement for a service in every church every Sunday. However, Nuffield is its own Benefice, and therefore is legally required to have a service every Sunday. I am grateful to the Rev. Ian Thacker, chaplain at Huntercombe prison, for his ministry once a month at Holy Communion, and to John Erbetta for officiating at Morning Prayer and Family services. At St. James, Bix Elfrida Calvorcoressi has continued to lead monthly services, assisted by John Hopkins and Alfie Hay. All of which has enabled ministry to happen as we maintain a regular pattern of services.

No progress was made this year in finding either a Parsonage House and/or a House for Duty property, and therefore no appointment of a House for Duty Priest occurred. At this point, after three and a half years, I doubt either will ever happen due to the mismatch between property prices in our area and the expenditure on housing the Diocese is willing to approve. This means that we must pragmatically adjust to the limits on ministry this imposes.

You will recall that pandemic restrictions finally came to an end at the beginning of the year, and so we moved, during its course, from two zoom services a month in the morning to one in the afternoon. I am grateful to the technical team for their steadfast commitment and to Jo Winch, Benefice Administrator, for all her behind the scenes work.

The pattern of services and availability of clergy around the parishes has meant that there were fewer services than in 2019 (i.e., prior to the pandemic); but average Sunday attendance (ASA) went up very slightly, and particularly so at St. Bartholomew's. This should be of encouragement because nationally the Church of England (CofE) has seen a significant decline in attendance post-pandemic.

The official figures for CofE attendance have not yet been calculated for 2022, but I have seen projections of a 15-20% decline in ASA from 2019 predicted. The decline from 2019-2021 was 45%, but it is expected that figures will reveal that ASA continued to grow in 2022, but not up to where it was in 2019. So, the fact that ASA in our Benefices marginally increased compared to 2019 is significant in a positive way (I have used ASA because that is what the Church of England uses, but obviously the median calculation would provide a more stable and reliable calculation).

Here are some 'local' statistics:

- St. James, Bix: 26 Sunday services. ASA 29, no baptisms or weddings & four funerals.
- St. Bartholomew, Nettlebed: 16 Sunday services. ASA 36, one baptism, two weddings, three funerals.
- Holy Trinity, Nuffield: 50 Sunday services. ASA 7, no baptisms, weddings or funerals.
- Pishill Church: 16 Sunday services. ASA 23, no baptisms, one wedding and one funeral.
- St. Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys: 26 Sunday services. ASA 24, no baptisms or weddings, seven funerals.

Overall, in the Church of England there has been a 30% + drop in the number of baptisms, weddings and funerals in the last twenty years, and this is projected to continue at an accelerated pace. So, our figures are not unusual. The Church of England has seen a 40% decline in weekly attendance since 2011 and during that period there was a 57% rise in the number of people stating on the Census form that they have 'no religion.' We are living in a society where secularism is increasing exponentially and the shrinkage of the CofE is inevitable.

Given this rather alarming but not entirely unpredictable trend, we should be encouraged that in our little corner of the CofE we have maintained regular worship and seen attendance slightly increase. It should be noted that in addition to officiating at funerals in churches, I have also done so in crematoriums where the greatest number of funerals occur throughout the country.

During the year I regularly took Holy Communion to about half a dozen people who couldn't attend Church and visited parishioners in their homes and in hospitals. I also presided at a monthly Holy

Communion service at Huntercombe Hall for frail the elderly and attended a monthly coffee morning held in Nettlebed. In February, our area Bishop, Gavin Collins, Baptized a child and Confirmed three people during a service at St. Bartholomew's, and towards the end of the year I again began Confirmation preparation for people interested in exploring the Christian faith in depth. Throughout the year, the weekly Zoom Bible study met; and during Lent a faithful group gathered at Bix Manor to discuss the Ten Commandments. The Diocesan Bishop, Steven Croft, visited the Henley Deanery this year, and I attended Deanery Chapter and Synod meetings. I am grateful to the Deanery Synod Representatives in our various parishes as they bring information back about the National Church.

In September I took a retreat at the Community of St. Mary the Virgin in Wantage. This was the first retreat I had been on since 2016! It was a time of peace, reflection, and spiritual renewal in which the words of our Lord 'Abide in me as I in you' (John 15:4) became especially resonant. This is a word for all of us. May we all draw closer to our Lord in 2023.

God bless you and make you a blessing to others.

Mark Ainsworth, PIC

HOUSE FOR DUTY PRIEST – Since 2016 this Benefice has been without a Diocesan appointment for a House for Duty post. During 2021 the HforD property designated for this position which had been rented out by the Diocese since 2016, was sold. The HforD/Associate Priest post is still in abeyance while the Diocese finds an appropriate house for the stipendiary Priest so that the HforD can live in 1 Old School Green. The delay in acquiring a replacement Rectory and making the Associate Priest appointment is very unsatisfactory and it is inconceivable that during the last four years, since the sale of the Nettlebed Rectory (post the advertised PIC's appointment but prior to our current PIC's arrival, thus rendering him homeless on arrival) the Diocese has been unable to comprehend that the prices for a property to match the Diocesan guidelines for a stipendiary ministers Rectory are more expensive in the south east corner of the Diocese and rising daily; that they need to increase the budget to enable them to purchase an appropriate property which should be regarded as a capital investment and one on which they will not lose value.

VISITING CLERGY

Rev Keith Knee-Robinson continues to assist with Zoom and once we were able, live services in the Benefice and at St. Nicholas. With the continued absence of a House for Duty Priest this Benefice and our PIC would struggle and we are indebted to Rev. Keith Knee-Robinson for his continuing help.

REPORT FROM THE KEEPER OF THE CHURCH

In the absence of another candidate, Mrs Ovey stepped into the role of Church Warden from October 2021 until the Annual Meeting in March 2022, As there was still no one younger or willing to take on the role Mrs. Ovey agreed to continue but has abstained from being formally admitted to the role of Church Warden. As the Benefice is only headed by a PIC who as such has the responsibility for the cure of souls but not for the Benefice Buildings Mrs. Ovey does not wish to be identified by the Diocese as being responsible for the building and has elected to be known as Keeper of the Church. Nevertheless with the support of the rest of the PCC the Church of St. Nicholas is in the good safe hands of the PCC.

In the absence of an Associate Priest St. Nicholas continues to hold live services twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Sundays, the 2nd Sunday offering Choral Evenson and the 4th Sunday Holy Communion. 5th Sundays continue to offer a joint Benefice Service at 10.30am in each parish church by rotation. As live services were offered throughout the Benefice in 2022 the Zoom morning services on the 1st and 3rd Sundays were discontinued but a Zoom evening prayer on the 3rd Sunday each month continues and after the Bible Study meeting. It is hoped that the Diocese will make a better effort in 2023 to address the problem of a replacement Rectory so that an Associate Priest/House for Duty appointment may be made.

CURRENT SUB-COMMITTEES

Buildings/Fabric/H&S: Paul Fairweather, Robert Barrett (until August 2022) and Nigel Denis.
Elizabeth Building Management Committee: Elizabeth Hodgkin, Margaret Thomson & Elaine Dudeney
Keeper of the Flagpole: Robin Rippon
Keeper of the Churchyard: Robin Rippon
Keeper of the Sidemen: Susan Samuels:
Charity Committee: because staffing of this Benefice means each church can only offer two services a month this committee has gone into abeyance until such time as there are once again regular services with special collections being link with appropriate Sundays for charitable distributions

KNOLLYS CHAPEL

A separate Trust looks after the Knollys Chapel; the Trustees are Barnabas Brunner, Sam Samuels and Rod Offer.

SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

The Safeguarding Officer for the Benefice is John Hopkins of Bix Parish

The House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance begins with a reminder to us that:

'Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian faith. We are all made unique and in the image of God. Jesus came that we might have life and have it in abundance (see John 10.10). 'Safeguarding' means the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture in all our churches. In order to achieve this a good deal of hard work is required.

Thankfully in each of the benefice churches there has been a good degree of willingness and commitment shown towards carrying out this work.

The progress made with the online Basic Awareness and Foundation Safeguarding training has been excellent and most church members in the benefice who are required to fulfil this have now done so. It does however still remain a requirement for those PCC members who have not yet done so, to complete this and send their certificates to me the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).

In August 2021 the Oxford Diocese established a Parish Safeguarding Dashboard. This online facility is a service which enables detailed records of safeguarding progress and requirements to be made known. It has proved extremely useful for this benefice and has made it possible for our progress towards satisfying our safeguarding duties to be good. Indeed we are on target to fully satisfy our duty to have 'due regard to the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance.'

I am the PSO covering the whole benefice but as I am primarily working in St James at Bix it has been agreed that each of the benefice constituent Churches should identify a PCC 'Lead Safeguarding Member' who would be someone known, active and engaged in the congregation who would work with me to enhance safeguarding. This should ensure better diversity and ease communication between me and each separate congregation. It should enable effective direct and personal communication about a range of relevant issues from encouraging and monitoring safeguarding training through to having someone readily available and locally known point of contact. This has been agreed with Nettlebed and Pishill and is planned for Rotherfield Greys as well.

Communication with our PIC, Rev. Mark Ainsworth, has been most helpful and his encouragement and full cooperation has been vital in keeping our safeguarding journey on course.

John Hopkins (Safeguarding Officer The Nettlebed Benefice)

March 2022

[The St. Nicholas PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults).]

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Our H&S policy was reconsidered by the PCC but no refining was considered necessary. H&S continues to be an agenda item for every PCC meeting. Proposals to make it easier for infirm parishioners to step up to or step down from the chancel step have been proposed and considered, but any action is still outstanding. Some repositioning of flower pedestals and lighted candle pedestals has taken place to reduce the chance of the pedestals being knocked over.

ELECTORAL ROLL

The final number of people on the roll for 2022 was 33. This number permits 6 lay representatives to sit on the PCC. RO

FACULTY APPLICATIONS

No faculties were applied for in 2022

WORSHIP, SERVICES AND FESTIVALS

The Regular Pattern of Services

Worship has continued to be conducted via Zoom (meetings) during this epidemic until permission was given to conduct live services and meetings. Since we still have no House for Duty Priest it was not possible to return to the full rota of weekly Sunday lives services. The Benefice PCC decided that each Parish Church could have two services a month with Zoom worship continuing on the 1st and 3rd Sunday. The first Benefice live service was held in the ruins of Old Bix Church on the 29th August. Since then St. Nicholas has held live services twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Sundays, the 2nd Sunday offering Choral Evenson and the 4th Sunday Holy Communion. 5th Sundays continue to offer a joint Benefice Service at 10.30am. Special live services for 2021 were: Harvest Festival, The Advent Service, The Nine Lesson and Carols, Christmas Eve Carols around the Tree and Midnight Mass

The Choir & Music at St Nicholas

Nicholas Bliss was appointed organist in May 2021. Once live services commenced the choir returned and the church was full of music. For the Queen's Platinum Jubilee a splendid concert was presented on the evening of the 2nd June followed by the lighting of the Beacon and fireworks. Mr. Bliss resigned in December 2022 to return to South Africa. A replacement organist is being sought.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Remembrance Sunday and Garden of Remembrance

On Remembrance Sunday, 13th November, a ceremony was held at All Saints, Peppard which was attended by members of the Peppard and Greys congregations. The ceremony included prayers, the usual bugle calls, silence and wreath-laying. The Peppard church choir was robed and sang. Afterwards the ceremony of the Roll of Honour took place at the Rotherfield Greys war memorial at 1200 hrs.

The Patronal Festival

The Patronal Festival was celebrated on the 4th December 2022

Advent and Christmas Services

- ***9 Lessons & Carols*** - 18th December 2022

- **Crib Service** led by George and Georgina Lamb was held on the 24th December at 3.30pm
- **Midnight Mass** was celebrated at 11pm at St. Nicholas
- **Christmas Morning Service** was celebrated at 10.30am and led by Mrs. Ovey

CHARITABLE COMMITTEE - GIVING & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Because it is not possible to hold live services every Sunday it was decided to suspend the special collections for the present but to note that they will be reinstated in the future. Our past policy is to donate collections at four specific services each year to nominated charities (Easter Day, Whitsun, Harvest Festival, Mothering Sunday).

Meanwhile charitable contributions from St. Nicholas take the form of the

- **Food Bank** Collections for the Food Bank are made with other churches as part of the Churches Together movement, the
- **Giving Tree 2022** Presents were wrapped and placed under the tree at the west end of the Church in 2022 several large sacks from our Church were distributed by NOMAD in Henley to families in time for Christmas and.
- **The Crib Service Collection** to a children's charity

THE CHURCH COMMUNITY – the St Nicholas community continues to owe a great debt of thanks to all those members of the congregation and parish who, through their contributions share in the wider ministry of the church. Servers, Sidesmen, Readers, Prayer Leaders, Coffee and Refreshment Providers, Flower Providers and Arrangers, Brass Cleaners and Volunteers who work in the churchyard all contribute in very valuable ways.

THE SIDESMEN

Once again grateful thanks are owed to all those who have volunteered to sign up to the rota. The pattern of services has continued bi-monthly, with a BCP evening prayer on the second Sunday of the month and a Holy Communion on the fourth.

Sidesmen and Intercessors have been required but not coffee makers, as for now we are still wary about gathering for coffee after the services. Hopefully this will change before too long as the restrictions ease, and once again we will be able to experience the happy buzz of chatter in the Elizabeth Room.

If you would like to sign up to the rota please do not hesitate to email me at susansamuels@btconnect.com. We would all be delighted to welcome you: at the moment a duty falls once or twice every three months. SS

THE FLOWER & BRASS GUILD (THE FAB TEAM)

We were very happy to be able to host our annual get together in The Elizabeth Room on 28th October 2022. It's with great thanks to all the team that we now have around 30 people on the FAB team. I am very proud to co-ordinate this fabulous team for the years to come. JD

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES & OUTREACH

Within the Parish

- **Visitors viewing the Church and Knollys Tomb** – The BBC filmed part of the Josh Widdecombe episode of “Who do you think you are” early in 2021 otherwise it has been a very quiet year during lockdown
- **Pastoral visits** members of the church community try to visit fellow parishioners that are known to be sick, lonely or otherwise distressed.

- **Bible Study Group**

The Zoom Bible Study Group continues to meet on Wednesday afternoons and this is followed a celebration of Evening Prayer

The Bible Study group meets regularly on a Monday afternoon in the Elizabeth Room with an average of six participants under Keith Knee-Robinson's guidance. .

- **Andrea's Café** Although the café was considerably interrupted by the pandemic throughout most of 2021, we were able to restart in the autumn and again offer the usual fare of a warm welcome, delicious home cooked food and friendly company. The café has always proved particularly popular with those who occupy the town end of the parish so goes some way to fulfilling the purpose of Andrea's vision of welcoming more souls to St Nicholas from the larger part of the parish. Many thanks to all who work so hard each month to make the café happen. If anyone else likes to cook, chat, or even wash up for a few hours one day a month, the café can always use willing hands.
- **Village Fete** took place on the 1st Sunday in September at Greys Court by courtesy of the National Trust. It was a great success and exceptionally well attended
- **E-Contact** The e:magazine has grown from two A4 pages to on average 14-16 pages and has evolved over the time to provide more information and articles on local events, etc. It has been found that we are able to produce a magazine that can have lots of colour pictures, is flexible and takes just the press of a button to deliver. Toward the end of 2022 plans were suggested to re-introduce a magazine which would be produced every other month and delivered to every house in the parish. Meanwhile e-Contact continues bi-monthly.

WITHIN THE BENEFICE

- **Weekly email**
- Emails are sent out from the Benefice office each week. The PIC composes two which include news, prayers, a reflection and a verse of Scripture.
- **House Communion**
House communions were held within the Benefice for those unable to come to Church have been held when possible during 2022.

THE ROTHERFIELD GREYS EDUCATIONAL CHARITY

Charity No 284643: Scheme of 22 January 1982

Charitable Objects

To promote in such ways as they think fit the education of persons under the age of 25 years who are resident in the area of benefit (being the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys) and who are in need of financial assistance in accordance with the principles and doctrines of the Church of England. The income of the Charity is totally dependent upon the way in which the Diocese invests the capital on our behalf. The Charity continues to fund the bibles presented to children baptised at St. Nicholas Church. The trustees are Rodney Offer, Richard Ovey, Sam Samuels.

BUILDINGS, FABRIC, TELEPHONY AND BROADBAND

The PCC undertakes its obligations in reviewing the state of the structure and fabric of the church building by way of a twice-yearly visual inspection. A written report is placed before appropriate meetings of the PCC and is transmitted to Mr Richard Oxley, our Architect Advisor, in order that any findings can be integrated in future planning should repairs be required. The last inspection was undertaken in early November 2021 and was available for the Archdeacon's inspection later that month. All surveys and reports feed into the Quinquennial inspection and report. In the previous year, a major problem was discovered as a result of a water leak in the roof of the chancel. Rotted timber had fallen internally from the roof, and investigations by Mr Richard Oxley reported that masonry was saturated and a roof timber was in need of replacement. Scaffolding was required as the bulk of the repair work was required from the outside of the building where significant amounts of tiling had to be removed and replaced to allow new waterproof flashings to be applied either side of the upstanding roof wall. There was also some cosmetic repair work on the ceiling of the chancel to repair damage caused by the ingress of rainwater. This whole project was completed during the year.

There was an ingress of water into the lobby of the Elizabeth Building which, after careful inspection and analysis, was isolated and the matter fully resolved.

There has been a fall of wall tiles to the north side of the Altar behind the heavy curtains and this is being investigated. There are indications that some tiles are spalling on the south side of the Altar and this is being included as a part of the overall investigation into the possible cause.

There is a clear need for the Vestry to be redecorated but this will need to be judged in relation to other demands and available funds.

The church office is supplied by a landline and an associated broadband package, the latter being unsuitably slow for modern communications needs. The limitations have been further highlighted with the introduction of Zoom services. As a result we have been investigating options for a much faster broadband and telephone package. The introduction of fibre broadband into the village has opened the option of a 100Mbps link to the church and discussions are at an advanced stage of connecting to a full fibre supply. This should enable us to progress our ambition to broadcast services direct from the church as and when required.

Knollys Chapel

This Knollys Chapel Trust helps to maintain the monument

Sir Robert de Grey Brass

The brass continues to remain uncovered and appears in good condition with no damp problems.

ELIZABETH BUILDING

The Elizabeth Building continues to be a valuable and well used facility. The regular groups are now gradually returning, eg Andreas Cafe, the Sue Ryder Cafe, the chair caning group and various meetings and groups to do with the church, including choir practice. The regular Art group and the Bellringers, hope to return soon.

A new outside key safe has been installed to negate the need to go through the church to gain access to the building. It is easy to use and is a success. There is plenty of scope for more hirers to use the building.

THE CHURCHYARD

During the year the small team met for mowing about twice a month during the grass growing season (apart from joining the current trend of a 'no mow May' to contribute to encouraging plant diversity) using the three mowing machines and a strimmer stored in the churchyard shed and mower safe.

A decision was made to remove the two arbutus tree which were on either side of the lych gate that were refusing to grow vertically.

Attention was given to a large churchyard tree that had fallen and had come to rest on a neighbours fence with branches very close to an upstairs window. RR

WITHIN THE DIOCESE

THE DIOCESAN SYNOD

Minutes relating to Diocesan Synod are documented on www.oxford.anglican.org.

THE DEANERY SYNOD

Minutes relating to the Deanery Synod are documented on www.oxford.anglican.org