

Church Profile for Garland Street Baptist Church

Garland Street Baptist Church sees the hand of God leading us to a bright and fruitful future even in the midst of the challenges brought on by Coronavirus and a steady decline in participation in the church over the past several decades. In answer to our fervent prayers, the Lord has helped us to capture a vision of becoming a church that attracts, blesses, involves, and retains people from across all age groups. We're excited about joining with God in extending the love of Christ and the gospel to folks in west Suffolk and beyond. We've begun to develop more Spirit-led worship and are making inroads in creating a strong online presence. The adventure is just beginning, and we trust the Lord will lead us to a new minister with the gifts, abilities, experiences, and passion to lead us on this journey.



Bury St. Edmunds is a historic market town in west Suffolk. The abbey near the town centre dates back to 1020. A group of barons met at the abbey in 1214 and swore an oath to compel King John to accept the Charter of Liberties. This act led directly to the Magna Carta, agreed at Runnymede the following year. In 2018, the town had an estimated population of just below 42,000. Bury was hailed as 'Happiest Place to live in the East of England' by Rightmove in 2020. The town features a broad range of shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

Garland Street Baptist Church stands on the edge of the shopping and commercial area in the town centre, which is the scene of a thriving street market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. A significant residential area surrounds the church.



GSBC dates to 1834, when it replaced a smaller building just down the road from the current location. Ebenezer Chapel, the first congregation of Baptists in Bury, was established by 12 people in 1800.

Looking for God's leading

The current minister assumed the pastorate in September 2007. Like many churches across the country, GSBC has faced a number of challenges over the intervening 13 years. Membership has dropped from 110 to 71, and participation in church programmes and activities has decreased significantly. A number of organisations have either ceased ministry or experienced a drop in participation. The membership is composed largely of people in their 60s and older, and very few children, youth, and young adults are active in the church.

Despite the downturn over the past decade, we feel there is reason for optimism as we look to the future. GSBC is blessed by a small but devoted and talented core of leaders, and these men and women have been working diligently prior to and during the pandemic to develop a strategic vision for the next four years that, although challenging, is achievable. (Please see the attached vision document.) It involves enabling those within the church to grow in their faith while, at the same time, reaching out to others who are not yet Christians with the life-changing gospel. The mission and vision of GSBC are:

Mission: To follow Jesus and make Him known

Vision: By 2024, in God's strength, we will be united by a deepening faith and knowledge of Christ. We will be a multigenerational church, committed to sharing the love and message of Jesus with those who don't know Him as Saviour.

Making the church, the gospel, and Christianity relevant in a secular society in the 21st Century is a challenge facing all churches. We believe GSBC needs to adopt new approaches while not diluting the truth to which we have been called. In particular, we are seeking to have a much greater impact in the town and surrounding area, especially amongst youth as well as men and women in the 20- to 40-year-old age group. As we begin to execute our vision, we believe each member of the body of Christ here is gifted by God and has a role to play. We actively encourage all members of the fellowship to share in ministry.

Our next minister

A pastor brings unique, God-given gifts and abilities to the church. At GSBC, our next minister will embrace the significant challenges of turning around a decades-long decline, encouraging an ageing congregation, and developing fruitful outreach across all age groups. Our new pastor will:

- Provide strong, passionate, and enthusiastic leadership that will enable GSBC to move forward and embrace the changes needed to achieve our goals.
- Prayerfully ascertain and clearly communicate—with the help of the deacons—God's desires for the mission and vision of the church, building unity and a strong desire in each person in the congregation to participate in accomplishing the church's goals.
- Facilitate fresh initiatives and new approaches, placing a high priority on developing an effective outreach amongst those who don't know Jesus as Saviour.
- Have a deep knowledge of scripture and the ability to expound it clearly.
- Consistently provide dynamic teaching that will inspire and motivate those in the church to apply God's word, both as individuals and as a fellowship.
- Help members to know their spiritual gifts and encourage them to use these gifts to touch the lives of non-Christians throughout the town and beyond.
- Place a high priority on evangelism, preaching the gospel, personally leading individuals to faith in Christ, and training church members to share the good news effectively.

The church's theological position

We believe in one eternal God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe the entire Bible is the inspired word of God and is the believer's sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. We believe every human is born with a sinful nature and must repent and place his or her faith in Christ's atoning death on the cross. This is the only means of forgiveness and salvation. We regard all Christians as receiving the Holy Spirit at conversion and look for lives that demonstrate their Christian profession. We believe the church—the body of Christ—is a fellowship of believers drawn together to serve and glorify God among all those with whom they come into contact.

The ministry at GSBC is soundly Bible based. We seek to conduct worship that glorifies the Lord and to provide teaching that strengthens the faith of all who are part of the fellowship. We have a strong desire

to engage in evangelism in the town and surrounding area. Additionally, we aim to nurture new believers and encourage them to join home groups with experienced Christians.

We practice an open communion and invite all those who love the Lord in sincerity and truth to participate. Membership of the church is open to all believers on their profession of faith, but we encourage all candidates to be baptised prior to joining the church.

Leadership in the church

Diaconate

The leadership team is composed of the minister, six deacons (one of whom is Church Secretary), and Church Treasurer (who is not a deacon). All are trustees, and each plays an equal part with the others. Deacons are elected by the members, who also approve the appointment of leaders to the various church organisations at the annual church meeting.

Church members are generally supportive of the diaconate, but a new minister will be confronted by a few challenges based on the ageing membership of the congregation. First, there has been a declining pool of volunteers to carry out church programmes, which makes it difficult to accomplish all the leaders would like to do. In addition, a small group in the church are resistant to new ideas, and we are looking for a minister with the skills to help all in the congregation to embrace the changes that are needed for the church to move forward.

Church Meeting

We encourage members to attend church meetings, which currently are held every two months. Four of these are business meetings, and only members may attend. The other two are open meetings, and all in the church are welcome. We invite active participation and discussion from all members as we corporately seek God's will and direction for the church.

Ministry within the church and beyond

Worship

Our goal is to provide meaningful, Spirit-led worship each Sunday. Services are held at 10.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m., with greater numbers meeting in the morning. Communion usually follows worship twice a month. Our worship is a blend of traditional and modern music that features accompaniment on guitar, piano, or pipe organ. Members of the fellowship regularly share in leading worship, prayer, Bible reading, and music. We make use of computer-assisted projection in our services. Through the lockdown, we posted a weekly Bible reading, prayer, and sermon online and plan to continue this after personal worship is reinstated. We continue to look at how our current services are structured and are open to change and new ideas in order to create meaningful and engaging worship for all age groups.

Bible study and prayer

We have a well-established home-group network meeting on various days and times to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate. Many in the fellowship attended a home group prior to Coronavirus restrictions, and a few of the groups met by Zoom when live gatherings were prohibited. We ran a home group for young adults throughout 2019, but it disbanded shortly before the lockdown. We're also in the process of adding a new, online home group for people not yet part of a group. In addition to praying in home groups, members are able to participate in a prayer chain, a Thursday morning prayer meeting, an annual week of prayer, and other prayer activities.

Training and nurturing

We periodically host all-church training programmes, closing down home groups so all can take part. In the past, we've held church weekends away with a guest teacher/preacher. In addition to ministering to

members through our home groups, we've established a network of 'care groups' in an effort to ensure needs within the fellowship are identified and met. Over the past several years, despite publicity and personal invitations, we've been unable to conduct what had been annual Alpha Courses. We put on baptismal classes and a marriage preparation class as required.

Programs for youth and children

On Sunday mornings, we have offered Sunday Club and Bible Class for children and youth, but there is currently little participation in these activities. A Sunday morning crèche is available for infants. During the week, activities for Boys' Brigade and Aspire (the latter replaced Girls' Brigade several years ago) draw youngsters mainly from non-Christian backgrounds.



Activities for adults and older people

The weekly Ladies Afternoon Fellowship is made up predominantly of over-seventies. We launched a Friendship Club in 1999, and mostly retired people attend gatherings every two weeks. A Men's Fellowship meets monthly for breakfast on Saturday mornings. We also run a carpet bowls group and a table tennis group, each of which meets weekly. Our newest group, CAMEO, brings ladies together for a time of friendly fellowship and enjoying various crafts.

Reaching out

The congregation reaches out to all age groups through individuals and organisations in the church, but we recognise as a fellowship we need to engage more fully with the local community. Some of the activities we are involved with include:

- Leading (by members of the congregation) monthly services at two sheltered housing units and two residential homes.
- Supporting the work of Bury Christian Youth (an inter-denominational outreach to the schools of Bury and the immediate area).
- Providing volunteers for the Bury Drop In (right), an outreach to homeless people in the area, which we started in conjunction with other local churches.
- Hosting meals with a message, social events, and other activities to bring the fellowship together and as opportunities to invite non-Christian friends and colleagues.



Ecumenical involvement and the wider Baptist family

Around 20 churches operate in Bury with several more in nearby villages. It's difficult to determine how many people attend these churches, and estimates range from 2,000 to 4,000. GSBC actively participates with the other town-centre, nonconformist churches (Methodist, United Reformed, and Salvation Army) in united services at Easter and Christmas, regular meetings among the church leaders, and other ecumenical events.

The fellowship actively supports Christian Aid, with volunteers involved in house-to-house collecting.

Within the denomination, we have strong links with and support the Baptist Union, the Eastern Baptist Association, Baptist Missionary Society Home Mission, and local village Baptist churches.

Additional background information

People

The current membership of the church is 71, covering an age range from 25 to 90+. There are more women than men. Most of the congregation live in and around the town.

Premises



The church is comprised of three primary buildings. The main building includes the sanctuary, vestry, office, lounge, kitchen, and office space currently used by Bury Christian Youth.

Across the road, a church hall features one large room for special events, several smaller rooms, and a kitchen. The hall, now called the Elven Centre (right, named after a pastor who served the church for 50 years in the 1800s) was completed in 1893, and extensions were added in 1933 and 1973. A phased upgrade of the centre began in November 2019 and is continuing.



Immediately next to the hall is the manse (left), which was extensively upgraded in 2007. It is a large, five-bedroom house (one bedroom is a loft conversion). The ground floor has an entrance hall, large living room, a smaller room (that could be used as a study/office), kitchen, and toilet. On the first floor are four bedrooms and separate shower and bathrooms. The cellar has been converted to living space with stairs leading down from the kitchen. Outside is a modest walled garden and parking for two cars.

Finance

The church is self-supporting financially and has no outstanding loans.

A video version of the church profile is available at www.garlandstreet.org.uk/new-pastor. It provides additional information as well as photos and film of the town, the church's history, our ministry, and our hopes for the future.