

An interview with David Sparkes, Churchwarden

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David Sparkes is a research engineer at a local company in Great Malvern, Worcestershire, as well as being a Churchwarden, and husband to the Reverend Lynne Sparkes, vicar of St Mary's, Pickersleigh.

St Mary's is a relatively modern church building, built in 1958 to serve the new housing estates in Pickersleigh, Great Malvern. David and Lynne arrived together in 2013, the church was granted parish status in 2014, and David became Churchwarden in 2015.

In 2014, they started a community cafe in the church, having identified a need for a communal space for people to meet and socialise.

"We wanted to be able to provide access to services, as well as tea and toast, coffee and cake. We thought that by providing free internet access it would be a way we could help serve our community."



The Church Urban Fund and nearby St Wulstan's Catholic Church both helped fund the project, and, just as planned, the cafe became much more than a place to meet, greet, and eat. They also used the space to house a citizens' advice bureau, a credit union, a second-hand shop, and a children's play area.

The innovative and open-ended nature of the project meant that they were not sure to begin with exactly how long it might last. For this reason, and for the expected costs, David and the PCC chose not to opt for the installation of a land-line and a monthly broadband contract.

Given the location of St Mary's and the available mobile-signal strength – coupled with the building being modern and thus more conducive to the distribution of wireless internet – they opted for a mobile broadband solution.



"I guess one thing we hadn't appreciated was how useful access to the internet would be in a church setting. We've used it during services ... The bishop's lent message or Christmas message."

Although it's been upgraded since (to 4G) the church still uses a pay-as-you-go home WiFi mobile broadband solution; which they've so far found to be affordable, reliable, and sufficient for their needs. The connection has since been used by a handicraft class to stream YouTube demonstrations, to access videos and online resources during services, and for conducting church business in the office adjoining the building.



Although the connection was only originally sought to augment the community cafe they began in 2014, they've since found it's proven useful in every aspect of the church and community uses of their building.

"Like electricity and water, it's becoming a very fundamental thing in life."

During the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018, they realised that some members of their community would be watching the wedding at home alone, and so it was decided they'd make a community event of it by streaming the coverage live in the church, so they could all watch it together.

"As a church, our aim is to serve our community. And providing WiFi both for people in our church congregation and others who use our building; we see that as a way of serving our community in the 21st Century."

- [Find out what solutions are available to you](#)
- [Read more about what connectivity can do for you](#)

Useful links:

- [PDF: 'Legal options for complementary use of church buildings'](#)
- ['Exploring the wider community use of church buildings'](#)



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