

GOONANEMAN ANGLICAN PARISH

The Parish of Goonaneman

The Anglican Parish of Goonaneman is part of the Northern Region of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, and is located in Wide Bay / Burnett. It was named after a local landmark, Mt Goonaneman, when it was formed by the amalgamation of the former parishes of Biggenden, Childers and Gin Gin a little over twenty years ago. There are presently four churches and five worship centres: Christ Church, Childers; the community of St Francis, Woodgate (meeting in the community hall); St John's, Biggenden; St Mary's, Brooweena (which has an adjacent cemetery belonging to the church); and St Mary's, Gin Gin.

The halls attached to Christ Church, Childers and St Mary's, Gin Gin are rented to community groups on a regular basis, as well as being used for parish meetings, community outreach and fundraising. The old rectory next to St John's in Biggenden has been leased to Blue Care for some years (a new three-year lease has recently been signed), and provides a significant source of income.

The old rectory in Childers was replaced some fifteen years ago with a modern, low-set brick house, and this is where the priest lives.

Childers is a cane town on the Bruce Highway, approximately four hours from Brisbane by road and Tilt train service. It has a population of about 3,500, which is greatly increased by the number of visitors who pass through all year round. Bundaberg is 35 minutes away, Maryborough 40 minutes and Hervey Bay 45 minutes. It has a small hospital, three medical practices, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools and bus services to private schools in Bundaberg and Maryborough

The parish centres

Christ Church, Childers. Christ Church was dedicated in 1901, replacing the original church from 1888. It is a wooden, heritage-listed building, with beautiful stained glass windows designed by William Bustard. It is in pleasant grounds, with good off street parking, next to the church hall. There is a small, dedicated team of parishioners who clean the church and hall and maintain the grounds.

There is a Eucharist at 8.30 am every Sunday, with an average attendance of 12-15 people, and a service at 8.30 on Thursdays (although numbers are very small). There is an organist most Sundays but, when she is absent, hymns are played on iTunes through the speaker system. The long-term LA is retiring from this role, but will still be available to set-up the church for services.

Morning tea follows the service every Sunday. There is a monthly service at the Forest View retirement and nursing home complex. The Childers Mothers' Union was decommissioned in 2014, but Christ Church continues to host Lady Day in the Deanery every March. A service of Lessons and Carols is held with the Bundaberg Male Voice Choir on the first Saturday in December every year.

Cuppa and Company, a morning of fellowship, board games and crafts, is held every Tuesday. For the last three years Christ Church has taken a stall at the Childers Festival (on the last Sunday in July) and sold car parking spaces in the grounds for Festival goers. Last year this raised around \$1,500. The parish fete was re-instated in the grounds of Christ Church in 2023, with the support of the other congregations in the parish, and was successful both as a fundraiser (\$3,500) and as a community gathering. There is a Childers Heritage Weekend in May, during which the church is open to visitors and tour groups, with a display of quilts from the Childers Quilters and stalls and morning tea in the hall.

The Rectory is situated beside Christ Church, and is a good-sized family home, with four bedrooms, one with en-suite and air conditioning. There is a second bathroom, living and dining area which is also air-conditioned, a well-appointed kitchen and a covered deck at the rear. A meeting room and priest's study are integral with the house, but can be accessed by a separate entrance and locked from the house. The house has gardens and a two car carport at the front, solar hot water, and a rainwater tank.

St Francis, Woodgate. Woodgate Beach is a seaside town, many of whose residents are retirees, about 40 kms from Childers. The St Francis' community worships in the Woodgate Beach Community Centre, the rental cost for which is met by one of the parishioners. A Eucharist is held at 11.30 am on the second and fourth Sundays of each month, with an average attendance of around 8-12. The priest is assisted by two LA's at Woodgate and each service is accompanied by a pianist on the piano owned by Woodgate Community. It is usual to have visitors to the service, from among the many people who make Woodgate their holiday destination.

Most of the congregation are also members of the Christian Women's Fellowship group, which meets monthly.

St John's, Biggenden. Biggenden is 45 kms SSW of Childers, and its main industry is beef cattle. St. John's Church was dedicated in 1901, and is a traditional wooden church in large grounds with some attractive stained glass windows. There is a Eucharist service on the first and third Sundays at 11.30 am, with an average attendance of 6, followed by lunch. There is one licensed LA, who is however not always able to attend, and no organist.

There is also a service for the aged care residents at the Biggenden Hospital each month. The church is cleaned, and the lawn mown, by local residents who are paid by the parish.

The local Lutheran community uses St John's on fifth Sundays.

St Mary's, Brooweena. Brooweena is a small rural town 80 kms SW of Childers. The church sits on a hill 5 kms from the town. It has no power or sewerage, and relies on tank water and a septic tank. The little wooden church, dedicated in 1919 as a war memorial church, is listed on the Fraser Coast Regional Council heritage register. The Brooweena cemetery is attached and still has space available, although this will not be the case in a few years' time. A service is held monthly, at 9.00am on the first Saturday of the month, followed by morning tea in the gazebo on adjacent Council land. The average attendance has diminished in recent years to between 3-6, although the Christmas Eve lamplight carols service and eucharist is always well attended.

There is no LA or organist, although an organist comes from Maryborough for the carols service each year.

Fraser Coast Regional Council pays the parish to keep their adjacent land mown, and this covers the cost of mowing the church grounds and cemetery as well.

St Mary's Gin Gin. Gin Gin is 56 kms NW of Childers, in an area given over to citrus fruit, sugar cane and cattle. St. Mary's Church was dedicated in 1905. It is a wooden building in extensive grounds, which also contain the Godfrey Wilson Memorial Hall. There is a Eucharist at 5.00 pm on the first and third Sundays (4.00 pm from May to August, as some of the congregation live up to 50 kms away), with an average attendance of about 6-12. There are presently

no LA's, but there is a regular organist and a second parishioner who is also able to play.

The grass is mowed by a local person paid by one of the parish families, and the parish is currently looking for a cleaner, as there is no one in the congregation able to undertake this role. The hall has recently been re-floored, but work is needed to upgrade fans and lights in the hall and the church, to clean and paint the church roof, and to replace the toilet block. There is a substantial bequest associated with St Mary's which would be sufficient to cover the necessary work.

Administration.

The parish office is situated in the hall in Childers, and has the usual office equipment as well as a high-speed photocopier. The parish administrator, who is also the treasurer, lives in Bargara, but meets regularly with the priest. Records are kept using Xero and audited annually by a chartered accountant.

The parish is financially stable, with no debts, but is only able to support half-time ministry, and in recent years has relied on assistance from the Bush Ministry Fund to do this. There are bequests attached to three of the churches, and a fund for maintenance and improvements resulting from the sale of a disused church building.

For the last three years, the Parish Council has consisted of two representatives from each of the larger centres – Biggenden, Childers, Gin Gin and Woodgate - two of whom have also been parish nominators. A centre representative from Brooweena also attends meetings where possible. There have been no Wardens or Synod representatives for some years. The Parish Council meets on the second Saturday of each month, at 10.30 am, usually in Childers but also in each of the other centres (except Brooweena) once each year.

Special services. The patronal festival of each church is celebrated each year, with a morning tea or luncheon. There is a pet blessing service in October in most centres. Ash Wednesday is celebrated in multiple centres, and at least one of the Holy Week and Easter services are celebrated in each centre each year. Christmas Eve or Christmas Day is celebrated in each centre.

There are baptisms, although infrequent, in each centre, and a number of funerals each year. These are often for members of current or past parish

families who had left the area, but who return to be buried with family in the local cemeteries.

Biggenden, Childers and Gin Gin support World Day of Prayer in their local areas. Community groups use the halls in Childers and Gin Gin. A wreath is laid at the Anzac Day service in Childers each year, and the parish has involvement with school chaplaincy, community carols and other special events.

Challenges

- Finding a full time priest and funding his or her stipend
- An increasing workload with decreasing human resources
- Caring for our increasing number of elderly parishioners
- Caring for parishioners scattered over a wide area
- Growing the congregations
- Finding new ways to serve the community