

St Simon's Anglican Church
Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson
For God and Others

Executive Summary

St Simon's Parish was established in 1976. The church building and adjacent Rectory are located close to the principal shopping precinct of Kaleen, and St Simon's provides a focal point for Anglicans in the Canberra suburbs of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson. The St Simon's congregation is older than the average age of the local community, but it remains a highly capable, vibrant and committed Christian community. We have a membership of approximately 80 adults and 10 children.

St Simon's has prided itself on self-sufficiency since establishment, and while loans were taken out by the Parish to construct the Rectory and Church buildings, both have been paid off for many years. Up to 2024, St Simon's has always employed a full-time Minister and on occasions a youth worker. However due to loss of significant rental income in the last 4 years, combined with a reduction in the number of long-term parishioners, and the need to refurbish our 36 year old Rectory, St Simon's considers it prudent to now seek to employ a Minister at around 80% of full time hours (with work days and hours to be negotiated).

St Simon's is very conscious to not overburden a part-time Minister with unreasonable expectations. The core role of our new Minister will therefore be leading a team to deliver traditional and contemporary worship, providing pastoral care to people in need and working with the parish to improve connections with the local community and the wider church community.

The new Minister will need to be aware of the challenges and opportunities of growing and sustaining a Christian community within contemporary Australian Society, and in particular within the ACT, and support the congregation to develop and implement a plan that will ensure sustainable future ministries to the people of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson.

Introducing our Parish

The Parish of St Simon's sits within the jurisdiction of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Located on Georgina Crescent Kaleen, St Simon's provides a focal point for Anglicans in the Canberra suburbs of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson. It was built by parishioners in the 1970s, and it is located close to the principal shopping precinct that services the three suburbs. It is a low-profile brick building, located adjacent to the Kaleen Community Centre and next to a complex of social housing units.



Figure 1: St Simon's Anglican Church, front entrance

The Church is designed as a multifunctional facility which has provided a home for Girl Guides and school tutoring activities as well as worship and other Church activities.



Figure 2: Children's Christmas Service 2023



Figure 3: The Sanctuary



Figure 4: Flexible seating allows for different configurations to meet changing circumstances. Dispersed seating enabled us to meet Covid spacing arrangements.

St Simon's Rectory is located at 10 Staaten Crescent in Kaleen, adjacent to the Church (which is accessed from Georgina Crescent).

Built in the 1980s, it is a comfortable four bedroom, two ½ bathroom home with a separate rector's study. There is undercover parking in a lock up garage for two cars and additional carparking for cars and/or a caravan or boat in the grounds. The grounds also include a fenced back yard in which there are a number of mature trees providing shade, shelter and privacy.

The Rectory backs onto the church grounds with a gate entry. Both are within easy 5-minute walking distance of Kaleen's major shopping centre which includes a Coles supermarket, butchery, bakery, pharmacy, hairdressing salon, Australia Post outlet, and gift shop, as well as a family take away and coffee shop.

The local primary and secondary schools are also within easy walking/cycling distance. The Canberra city centre (Civic), Belconnen or University of Canberra are easily accessed on the bus network and a bus stop is close by.

The Rectory is currently being renovated to ensure that it is clean, fresh, functional and comfortable for its next occupants.

There is a Floor Plan and a 'helicopter view' at Appendix A.



Figure 5: St Simon's Rectory, 1988. Built with love and by the hands of parishioners



Figure 6: St Simon's Rectory, 2024

A Brief History of St Simon's

The Canberra suburbs in the Belconnen area grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Development in Belconnen started at Aranda in 1966 and moved around the valley in a clockwise direction to Cook, Hawker, Holt, Macgregor, Charnwood, Flynn and Evatt, finally reaching Giralang and Kaleen in the mid-1970s. More recently, in the early 2000s the new suburb of Lawson was established.

The rapid increase in Canberra's population presented a challenge to all the Christian denominations in Canberra as they sought to provide clergy and churches in new suburbs. In less than a decade, the Anglican Church established five new parishes or special districts in Belconnen, beginning in Aranda in 1968 and ending with Giralang-Kaleen in 1976. As Kaleen was still in its early stages of construction, the parish was initially based in Giralang as "an area under the care of the Bishop". The church's only building was a house purchased by the diocese and it was in this house that the first service was held on 7 March 1976.

Initially the parish was notionally under the control of St Philip's O'Connor with a deacon working part-time at St Philip's and part-time in Giralang where he and his family lived in the new church house. It was not long before the house was too small to cater for the Sunday congregation. The parish also realised that it was an unfair burden on the family to have to give up their home every Sunday morning. Within a few months services moved to the Giralang Community House, then the Giralang Primary School and from March 1978 the new Kaleen High School. With the move to the high school, a second Sunday service was introduced with a fairly traditional Holy Communion service at 8.15am and a less formal service, although usually Communion, at 9.30am.

From the inception of the parish, some parishioners were looking to construct a church building and a larger rectory. While initially there were insufficient funds, by the time the Kaleen Village Shopping Centre was developed in the mid-1980s the parish felt able to purchase a block of land behind the shops – the current site of the church. The first building to be constructed was a new and larger rectory to replace the house in Giralang, then a church building was erected. It was essentially a kit building, with the pieces being put together by parishioners with help from a couple of members who had professional building experience. The first service in the new building was held on Christmas Eve 1988.

The years from 1985 to about 2010 were times of extraordinary activity, outreach and community involvement at St Simon's. In addition to the building program, ministry to the vulnerable and ministry to youth became a focus for the parish. St Simon's has always been concerned about the needs of the most vulnerable people in society. In the late 1970s the parish sponsored a Vietnamese refugee family for several years. Then, from 1989 until the mid-1990s St Simon's operated two emergency care homes – a boys' home called Bethabara and a family shelter called Bethany. These two homes provided vital care and support to desperate people but unfortunately the stresses involved in these difficult projects meant that Bethabara closed in 1995 and Bethany in 1996. With the closure of Bethany and Bethabara, the parish turned its attention to youth ministry.

By 2000, the Friday night youth group attracted at least 60 young people each week. For some years the youth group leaders had been paid an allowance but in 2001 the parish took a bold decision to employ a full-time youth minister. However during the decade 2000-2010, the demographic make-up of Kaleen and Giralang and also the age profile of the parish changed

markedly. With the aging of the suburbs, there was now a lower percentage of young teenagers to provide the foundation for a large youth group. Indeed, the government even proposed closing Giralang Primary School but after strident community opposition the government eventually abandoned the plan. In light of this demographic change the parish decided to cease employing a full-time youth minister in 2010 and revert to a part-time person.

The development of the new suburb of Lawson from about 2010 brought more people into the geographical parish area. As the first people moved into Lawson, St Simon's parishioners tried to visit each new house, but the rapid growth of the suburb soon made this impossible. However, St Simon's continues to hold an annual barbecue and carol singing in Lawson each December.

The pattern of services at St Simon's changed little from the introduction of a second morning service in 1978, apart from the introduction of a Wednesday morning service in 2006 which regularly attracts 10-20 people. However, all this changed in 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19 in Australia. At that time attendance at the 8.00am service was typically around 25 and at 9.45am around 50. COVID restrictions meant that Sunday services had to cease but services were streamed via Zoom. When churches were allowed to re-open, it was decided to have only one Sunday service, at 9.00am, and this has continued. Over fifty people attend in person each Sunday with several others attending via Zoom.

St Simon's and Our Neighbourhood

St Simon's Anglican Church is in Kaleen, but also draws on, and represents the people of Giralang and Lawson. As previously discussed, Kaleen and Giralang were established in the mid-to-late 1970s and the original families have grown up and, in many cases, moved away. These two suburbs are undergoing renewal with new families moving in as the original inhabitants leave.

Lawson is a different demographic. As one of Canberra's newest suburbs, Lawson is an 'in-fill' suburb, located on the site of an old naval communications station. Development of the suburb has focussed on high density residential living with town houses and apartments predominating. Much of the original naval communications station site is intended to remain as grassland to protect several endangered species. While development in Lawson might be coming to an end, some new land releases continue, and the suburb has not yet finished growing. There are no community facilities in Lawson and no schools have been built or are planned. The residents of Lawson therefore rely on services and community facilities in Kaleen and Giralang.

Demographics - Age

Population					
	Kaleen		Giralang		Lawson
	2011	2021	2011	2021	2021
Total Population	7313	7672	3304	3372	2739
Median age	37	39	35	38	28
Under 25	32.50%	29.30%	32.70%	31.20%	34%

Figure 7: Population of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson. (Source ABS Census Data 2011 and 2021)

As Figure 5 indicates, the total population in Kaleen and Giralang is approximately 10,000 with some small growth continuing. The most significant growth in our catchment over the last decade has been in the new suburb of Lawson.

Kaleen and Giralang have aging populations, but urban regeneration is occurring and there remains a substantial population of children and youth. There are three public primary schools in these suburbs, one Catholic primary school and one high school, all of which are busy and vibrant. ACT government policy has made it difficult to engage successfully with public schools. We did operate a breakfast program at the High School for a number of years, but it became too resource intensive to maintain, and the program ceased.

It has been many years since we operated a Kids Club or Youth Group. Our affiliation with the Girl Guides Troop ended after a Guides' restructure closed the local unit last year. We do maintain a connection to young families with toddlers, through the Mainly Music program.

Like our catchment, the St Simon's population is aging but at an average age of over 60 our church population is about twice the average age of the population in the suburbs in which we live.

Lawson has a different demographic to Kaleen and Giralang, with a large student population who attend the adjacent University of Canberra. University students are not currently represented within our congregation. St Simon's has endeavoured to engage with the people of Lawson, but this has largely been limited to a Christmas carol service in a Lawson park. While the carols service is well attended and very well received, it has not led to any new members from Lawson joining the congregation.

Demographics – Religious Affiliations

In addition to St Simons Anglican Church, Kaleen is the home of four other churches:

- St Michael's Roman Catholic Church
- St Mark's Coptic Church
- All Saints Greek Orthodox Church
- Jesus is Lord Church (a Filipino Gospel Church)

There has been little or no interaction with the other churches in our area in recent years.

As Figure 6 reflects, within the suburbs of Kaleen and Giralang, ABS Census data reflects a dramatic growth in atheism (that is those who declare no religion). This trend is consistent, if a little higher than similar trends across the ACT and the Australian nation.

Religious Affiliation (Top 5 Responses)					
	Kaleen		Giralang		Lawson
	2011	2021	2011	2021	2021
No religion	29%	42%	30%	47%	46%
Catholic	27%	21%	25%	19%	12%
Anglican	13%	8%	14%	9%	NR
Uniting	4%		4%		
Orthodox	4%				
Christian (Not further defined)			3%	3%	
Hinduism					10%
Buddhism		3.40%			5%
Not stated		4.60%		4%	

Figure 8: Religious Affiliations in Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson (Source ABS Census data 2011 and 2021)

In the 2021 Census, approximately half of the population in our catchment declared themselves to have no religion. This has risen from approximately one third in the 2011 Census and this growth has been at the expense of all traditional Christian denominations. The impact on Anglicanism has been a 35% to 40% reduction in the number of people who affiliate as Anglicans. This downward trend may have been accelerated by COVID 19, but it is likely that the next Census outcome will demonstrate that the trend is continuing.

In Lawson, there has been a significant influx of people from the Indian subcontinent which explains the rise in Hinduism in that suburb. It is anticipated that a similar trend will be reflected in Kaleen and Giralang in the next Census data.

Our Congregation

The St Simon's congregation is older than the average age of the local community, but it remains a highly capable, vibrant and committed Christian community.

We have a membership of approximately 80 adults and 10 children.

The new Minister at St Simon's will be ably assisted by two members of the congregation who are retired clergy and whose wisdom and experience are highly valued. Their contribution to worship and daily life is one of our hallmarks. We also have a long history of preparing candidates for the Ministry and this continues with a current ordination candidate.

Within the laity there is a significant proportion of highly educated people, many of whom have held senior appointments in the public service or the military, as well as practical tradesmen, engineers and builders, and professionals.

About 20 people are engaged in leadership roles and maintain the fabric of the Church community as members of Parish Council, lay readers, music team, bible study groups, Mainly Music, the grounds maintenance team, the hospitality team and repair and maintenance. Many of these people are engaged in multiple roles.

We have a participative style of worship that utilises the talents of parishioners as worship leaders, lay readers, prayer leaders and servers. We are also blessed by enough talented musicians to operate a music roster for the design, organisation and delivery of musical support to a range of worship, fellowship and outreach activities in the Church and within our neighbourhood.

Our Strengths

The People

The people of St Simon's are a community of loving, caring, people with a mature faith.

We have a sense of mission, a heart for outreach and a commitment to social justice. Parishioners are actively engaged in refugee support and advocacy, and we include several Sudanese members in our congregation. We also have a heart for supporting indigenous Australians and regularly incorporate Aboriginal liturgy in Sunday worship.

We draw on the talent and commitment of our parishioners to actively engage in a range of ministries and small groups, that provide teaching, fellowship and support, including three bible study groups.

We deliver a highly regarded Mainly Music program which connects with and supports many families with small children in our community.

St Simon's supports our aging community with services conducted at RSL Lifecare's Mona Tait Gardens in Kaleen. Through our 'house band', Bewdy Uke, we also provide musical entertainment for the Covenant Care program at Holy Covenant Church and RSL Life Care at Page. We have also supported the 100 Voices Choir and refugee fundraising events.

St Simon's is a happy, caring community that works together harmoniously.

Administrative Support and Systems

St Simon's draws on the intelligence and wisdom of its community members for the careful stewardship of our resources through a stable, effective and congenial parish council.

We are also blessed with a long-term part-time Parish Administrator who does a lot of work to keep the parish operating smoothly.

Worship

Our worship reflects strong gospel preaching, inclusive worship, prayerfulness, and music. We incorporate Anglican liturgy with contemporary and traditional music to create a welcoming and enjoyable joyful worship experience for all ages.

Our Sunday morning service is livestreamed through Zoom to maintain connection with parishioners who are unable to attend the Church.

Our worship has a highly participative style that draws on retired clergy, ordination candidates and lay readers and lay leaders to support our preaching program and to lead our services.

Our Challenges

Connecting with the Local Community

St Simon's has a heart for ministry to the local community and seeks to connect with our neighbours through events such as Christmas carols at Lawson, car boot sales and the collection of groceries outside Coles in Kaleen for St John's Care. Mainly Music is a long-standing ministry that attracts many families with young children. Many of our parishioners are actively engaged in social justice initiatives in the wider community and care for a number of families in need.

As a community we are keen to find new ways to engage with local businesses and residents of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson in ways that create deeper relational connection and opportunities for collaboration.

Different Styles of Worship

Our 9.00am Sunday service, uses a range of Anglican liturgies led by a Priest and lay leader. We are blessed to have a vibrant music team who play both contemporary music and traditional music from Together in Song. All liturgy and songs are projected onto a large screen and the service can be watched via Zoom for those who are unable to attend in person. A Holy Communion prayer book service is held each Wednesday at 10am which attracts around 15 people.

As we face our future, we are seeking to maintain a balance between traditional Anglican services and more contemporary styles of church that will be more appealing to younger and unchurched people from the local community.

Involvement in Church Community

While some of the parishioners are actively involved in one or more ministries and feel engaged with and supported by the St Simon's community, there are numerous others who turn up to the occasional service or church activity, but who are not actively involved and who probably don't feel a strong sense of 'belonging' at St Simon's. There are a few small groups operating, but the majority of the members of St Simons do not belong to any of these.

To increase the level of involvement within our church community, we need to develop stronger pastoral care systems to ensure that all new or prospective members of the church are quickly connected with the church to ensure that they come to feel a sense of belonging to the fellowship and that other parishioners care about them and are available to them.

Managing Our Finances

St Simon's has prided itself on self-sufficiency, and while loans were taken out by the Parish to construct the Rectory and Church buildings, both have been paid off for over 5 years. St Simon's to date, has always employed a full-time Minister. For periods of time St Simon's also has also had a paid youth worker, and on one occasion had a married Ministry team.

Prior to the advent of the COVID pandemic in 2020, a business called Big Improvements (supplementary tutoring for school age children) hired the hall and the on-site demountable building on a regular, long-term basis. This hire provided a very steady (and quite significant) source of income to the parish. This activity ceased during the COVID pandemic, and this group is no longer able to hire our facilities. While we did receive some assistance in the form of Diocese subsidies and JobKeeper from the government during the pandemic, this loss of income from hall hire, combined with a reduction in the number of long-term parishioners, has meant that we have seen a significant reduction in income for the church over the last 2-3 years. At the same time, expenses such as salaries, utilities and insurance have continued to rise. Our financial situation is currently solid, but having made significant losses in the last two calendar years, it is currently under some pressure. A major Thanksgiving event in 2023 has seen a marked upturn in giving and the financial position is expected to improve during the interregnum due to a part-time Locum being employed.

St Simon's finance will be impacted by the significant expenditure that is required to renovate and refurbish our 36-year-old rectory for a new Minister and family. St Simon's has estimated that it may need to spend up to \$85,000 (preliminary estimate) on the Rectory refurbishment, which will be covered by Diocese rental funds held (up to \$20,000 available), Parish Reserves (up to \$30,000 available) and modest loan of \$35,000 to \$40,000 from the Anglican Investment Development Fund. This loan will be easily manageable within St Simon's projected Budget figures.

Our financial challenge is to ensure that St Simon's continues to have sufficient income to employ a close to full-time Minister, and to sustain our various ministries, now and into the future – whether this is via increasing contributions from parishioners, additional rental of our premises to outside groups on a regular basis, or fundraising, (or a combination of them all).

Looking to the Future

At the parish consultation meeting that was held in June 2024, it became clear that while many members of the congregation are involved in a range of important and worthwhile ministries, there is a lack of clarity about our overall mission and what particular areas of ministry we should be focussing on, particularly within the local community of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson.

Accordingly, we believe that one of the first priorities of the new minister should be to facilitate a strategic planning process with the congregation in order to develop a more coherent shared vision for the future of St Simon's, and in particular to develop specific plans or programs to address the following key questions:

- What range of missional and outreach activities could or should St Simon's undertake to support the needs of the local community and those who are in most need?
- What form should our Sunday morning service/s take, and should we be looking to initiate a new, more contemporary form of worship service (possibly in the afternoon or evening) that is designed to reach out and be more appealing to unchurched people of various ages in our local community?
- What can we do to ensure that all members of the congregation, including newcomers and those existing 'on the fringe' of our fellowship, feel supported, cared for and encouraged to grow in their day-to-day experience of Christianity?
- How can we continue to manage our physical and financial resources to ensure ongoing growth and appropriate levels of support for the various ministries that we choose to be engaged in?

What can a new minister expect from St Simons?

A minister at St Simon's can expect to be welcomed and supported by a caring Christian community. We are a team who will support our new Minister by:

- Guaranteeing two days contact free each week
- Ensuring that leave is taken each year to allow for refreshment and recreation
- Providing administrative support from a capable and experience part time office manager
- Providing management support through a collaborative, harmonious and capable Parish Council
- Providing worship support through a team of lay readers, worship leaders and musicians

What are we looking for in a New Minister at St Simon's?

The new Minister will need to assist the Parish to sustain its existing congregation and grow the congregation into the future. Therefore, we expect that the Minister will work with the parish to improve connections with the local community and the wider church community.

In order to achieve this goal, the new Minister will need to be aware of the challenges and opportunities of growing and sustaining a Christian community within contemporary Australian Society, and in particular within the ACT.

The following are the attributes and skills which members of the Parish see as necessary for the new Minister at St Simon's and it is preferable that they will be able to demonstrate experience in these areas:

1. Ability to relate to and minister to people of all ages with varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds
2. Broad theological education and ability to interpret scripture in light of contemporary social and cultural context
3. Experience and success in leading a team of lay leaders
4. The ability to recognize and empower members of the congregation who have the skills to lead the congregation in the various areas of parish life, including experience and success in leading a team of lay leaders
5. The ability to mentor and guide members of the congregation who seek ordination or are actively preparing for ordination
6. Working with and utilising the talents and skills of retired clergy
7. Love of music (both traditional and contemporary) and its role in worship
8. Experience in managing change within a parish

The new Minister's role will include:

- Leading a team to deliver traditional and contemporary worship
- Commitment to providing theological education and spiritual formation of the congregation for application to daily life
- Providing pastoral care to people in need, including those in Residential Aged Care
- Supporting the congregation in developing and implementing a plan that will ensure sustainable future ministries to the people of Kaleen, Giralang and Lawson

Appendix A – Rectory Floorplan and Google Earth View

