

» St Andrew's 150th anniversary

New priest embraces church's role at centre of community for a century and a half

Festivities planned to mark milestone event

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A new priest is looking to celebrate the past as her church prepares to mark its 150th anniversary.

The Rev Lara Dose, 41, who became the priest-in-charge at St Andrew's Church, in St Andrews Road, Romford, in July, is eagerly anticipating the festivities that will mark the milestone.

"I am very, very excited indeed. We've got a lot planned," she said.

A flower festival, in which the entire church will be decorated in flora, takes place on October 6, a special choir festival on October 20 and a large commemorative service will be conducted on St Andrew's Day on November 30.

Appreciation

Despite not long in the job, Ms Dose already has an appreciation for the area and the church's heritage.

She said: "The place is amazing. I've enjoyed my time here immensely so far. The parishioners have all been very warm and welcoming."

"The church is a beautiful building and its history really ties in with Romford's own."

Built in 1862 on the site of a former barracks, St Andrew's construction was financed by the Romford brewery Ind Coope to provide a church for their local workforce.

The church came to service the people of the nearby Cottage Estate, the first built in Romford as the town became industrialised.

During the Second World War tragedy struck as St Andrew's suffered bomb damage. The large east-side window was blown out after a huge incendiary dropped in Cotton's Park, killing six.

Diversity

In 1996, a stained-glass window showing the transfiguration was installed to permanently replace the old one, and has since won several accolades and featured in a church art guide last year.

As part of the anniversary celebrations the church's reredos – a decorative screen

► The Rev Lara Dose

"I was born in Virginia in the United States. From a young age I felt a calling to the faith. I studied theology at university and then decided to do missionary work abroad."

"My travels took me to Russia a few months after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992."

The Communist Party had opposed religion and it was a pleasure to do God's work

during my time there.

"I immigrated to the UK in 1997, trained for ordained ministry and became pastor of St Agne's Church, in Manchester."

"This July I had the privilege to become priest-in-charge of St Andrew's. The church is amazing – the congregation are lovely, the building's architecture is stunning and the art inside is even better."

► Congregation Margaret Pettit

"I was five years old when I first attended St Andrew's in 1939. I started at a Sunday school class where we would sing hymns, say prayers and be taught the Bible."

"Romford was completely different then – it was all fields and farmland and the church was surrounded by tiny little cottages."

"The Second World War made it hard for me to attend regularly as I was evacuated during the Blitz but I've been ever-present since then – over 70 years of my life."

"I remember my confirmation in 1947 particularly well. Clothes were still on ration then so my confirmation dress had to be made from parachute silk."

"St Andrew's does mean a lot to me. There's not a lot left of the old Romford, it's all that's remained really."

behind the altar, damaged during the war – will be uncovered for the first time since the war.

The church is not just considered to history, however.

Ms Dose is determined to make St Andrew's a modern place of worship, noting that the congregation range from six week old newborns to octogenarians and is multi-ethnic.

She said: "Here at St Andrew's we are an inclusive church, which is unique."

"Anyone is welcome. It doesn't matter what race, age, gender or sexuality you are."

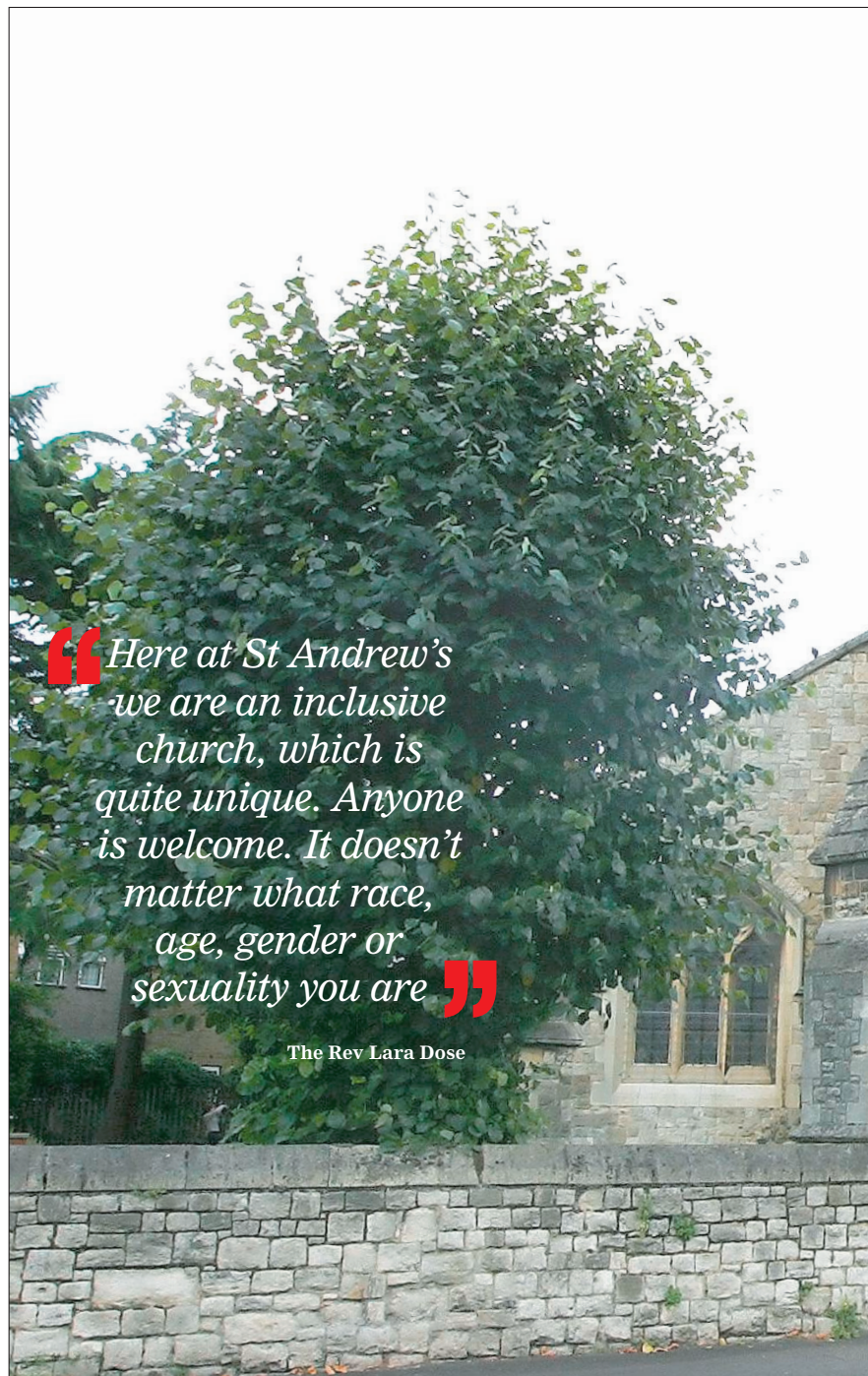
Ms Dose believes that with its forward-thinking attitude the church can still have as much impact in Romford as ever.

She added: "St Andrew's is more important now than when it was first built."

"Obviously things have changed but the church still stands as a centre point in the community."



■ Margaret Pettit has been a member of the congregation since childhood



“Here at St Andrew's we are an inclusive church, which is quite unique. Anyone is welcome. It doesn't matter what race, age, gender or sexuality you are”

The Rev Lara Dose

■ St Andrew's will celebrate its 150th anniversary with community events



■ The altar before the Second World War blast damaged it



■ The Rev Lara Dose



■ Sitting down is Fr Phillpotts, rector bewteen 1905 and 1916



ose with the altar screen damaged during the war



■ Replacement stained glass window



■ St Andrew's servers, circa 1950s