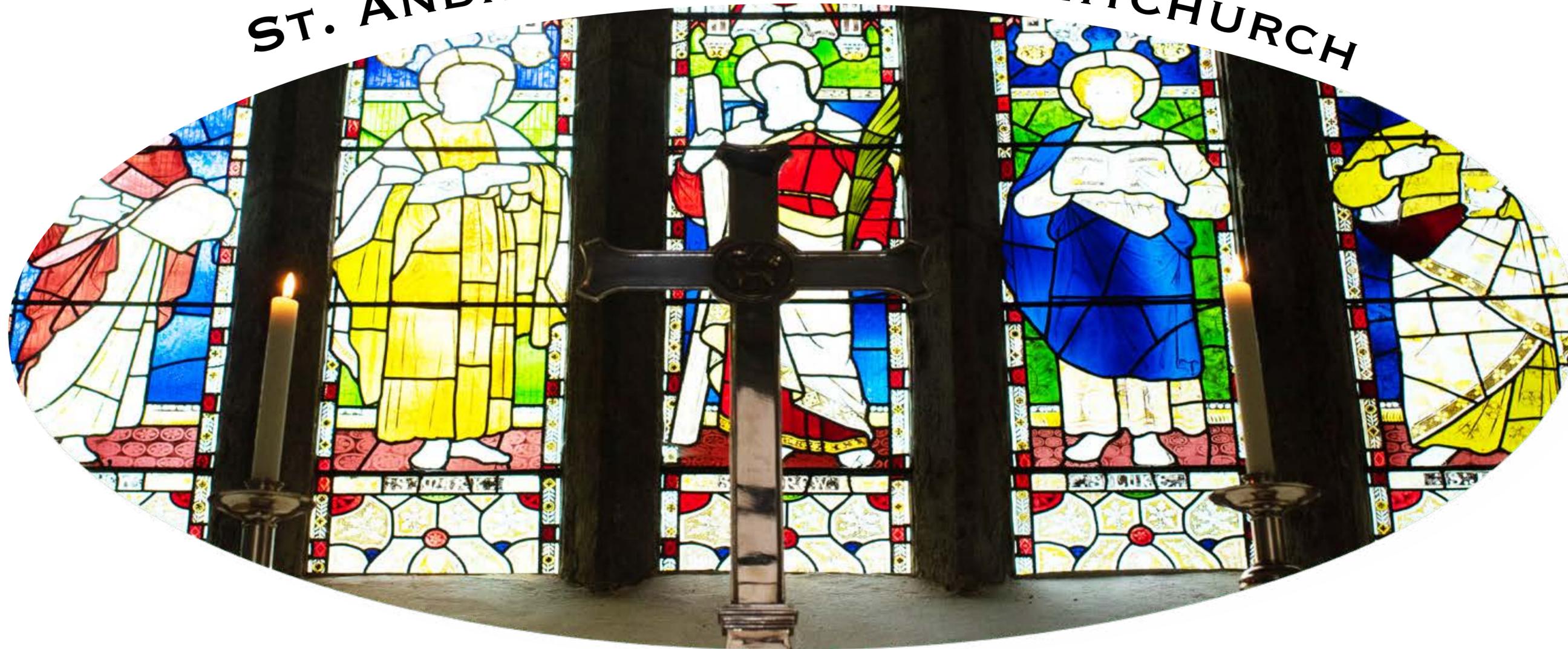


ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH : WHITCHURCH



CHURCH PLANNING

November 2021

Introduction

In the second half of 2021, the churchpeople of Whitchurch began a process of Church Planning.

The trigger for this was a recognition that our church had changed a great deal since our last planning exercise in 2014. We are just emerging from some turbulent times. Chief among these was:

- The Church Split of 2018 and
- The Covid Lockdown of 2020

Each of these alone were cataclysmic events in the life of any church. Nevertheless there are clear and growing signs that we have emerged from the flames: stronger, more united and clearer about who we are and where God is leading us.

Therefore we entered into the planning exercise in good spirit and high enthusiasm. This was evidenced by the turnout at our planning day. All our different congregations attended and contributed. Almost all of our church family attended. The only exceptions were those who simply could not, and these sent apologies. We listened to each other and reached good conclusions.

Finally, we made no attempt to reinvent the wheel. We recognise that we are part of the Anglican church in Devon and the Diocesan Strategy as our top level plan.

Instead we concentrated on the elements that will help us serve the people of God with Joy in our setting.

We concentrated on answering the following:

1. Who are we as a church? (I.e. what will a newcomer be joining)
2. Where are we strong and where are we weak
3. What is God calling us to do in His service?



Strategy

As mentioned above, our church adopted the Diocesan strategy as our overall guiding document. For completeness, we will outline this below.



Grape harvest © EDBF

Growing in prayer

We want to abide in Christ and live our lives close to God. This means taking risks as we become more honest with ourselves and more honest with God. Prayer opens up deep places within us to God's grace, which is why it is such a life-giving activity. Going deeper in prayer is essential if we are to witness to God's Kingdom and grow into the people God is calling us to be.

Making new disciples

A disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ. With Christ as our companion and guide, we can travel through life differently and invite others to share in the adventure. We want to be more faithful in our discipleship and allow God to shape our priorities and values. The gospel is good news but, if we are to bring more people to Christ, we need to find new ways of telling the story, of explaining our faith and giving a reason for the hope that is in us.

'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.' John 15.5

As God's pilgrim people, we seek to share in the mission of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by:

Serving the people of Devon with joy

We want to be ambassadors for Christ, making a difference in the world and witnessing to God's love and justice, especially in the communities where we live and in our schools and workplaces. Working in partnership with others who are transforming lives, we seek to address the global issues confronting our generation so that all may flourish.

Who Are We?

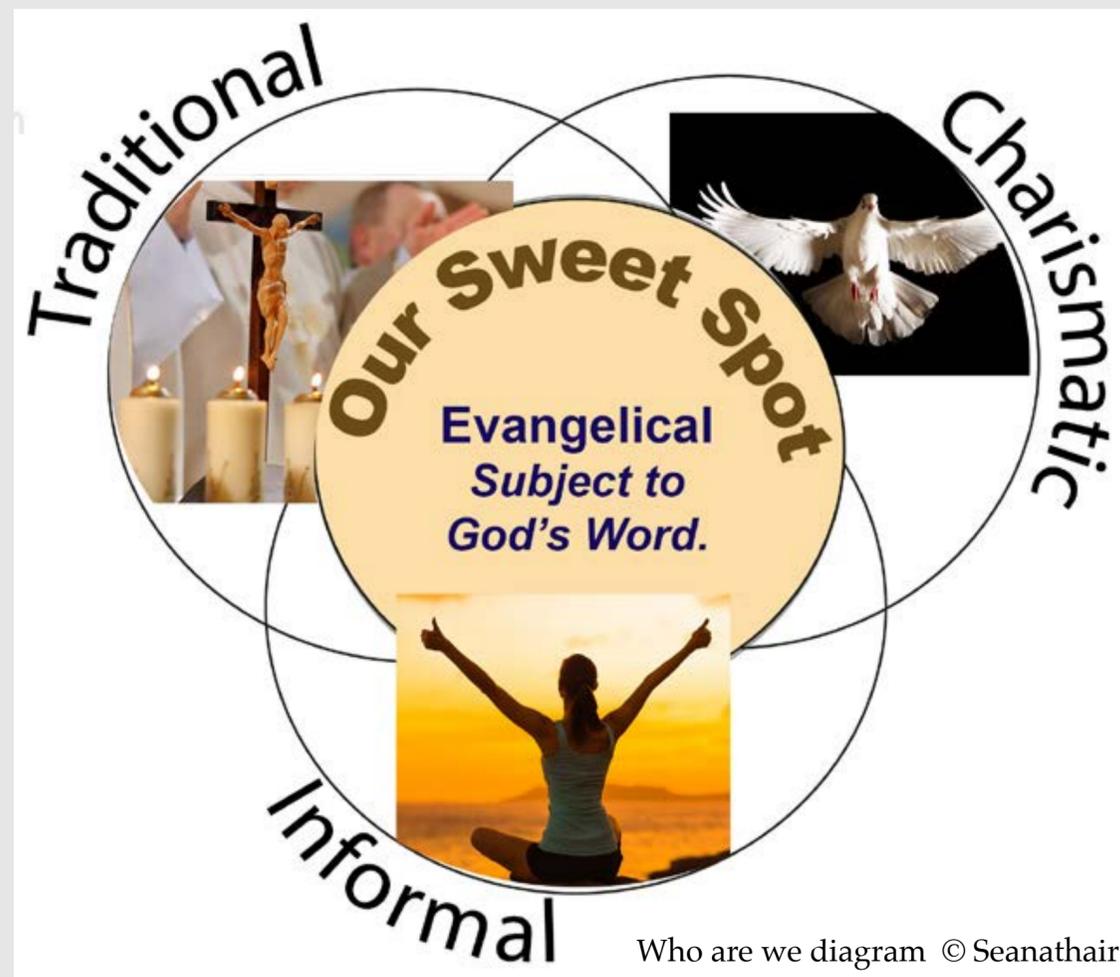
A strange question! But actually a critical one. Learning from past mistakes, it has become clear that lack of clarity in this area always leads to difficulties. Hence our determination to agree "Who we are". This will and already has given us self confidence and the ability to focus on *being church* in this place and giving Glory to God.

We are a Christian church: Christ centred and bible based. We part of the Church of England and in union and fellowship with our brother and sister Christian churches. We have been placed in the village of Whitchurch and are called by Jesus Christ to witness to and serve the people of Whitchurch parish and its close environs.

The question of our identity took quite a bit of discussion and the result was complicated. So, we chose to represent the outcome with a diagram. (See right.)

This picture summarises our conclusions.

- Our churchmanship is a happy blend of Traditional, Charismatic and Informal.
- We are the Parish Church and we celebrate all the big moments in the village life. Christmas, Easter, Harvest, All Saints, Remembrance. We serve the parish for weddings, baptisms and funerals.



- At the same time we believe in the sovereign power of God to answer prayer, to heal and to guide us through His Holy Spirit.
- Our third strand is a deliberate policy of informality. We believe this enables us to embody our God who is both transcendent and approachable. And that this will best enable us to welcome our parishioners and to serve them in the Love of Christ.

Finally and overlaying all these.
We are a biblical church;
acknowledging the Bible as
Spirit breathed and our ultimate
authority.

Where are we strong and where are we weaker



Strengths

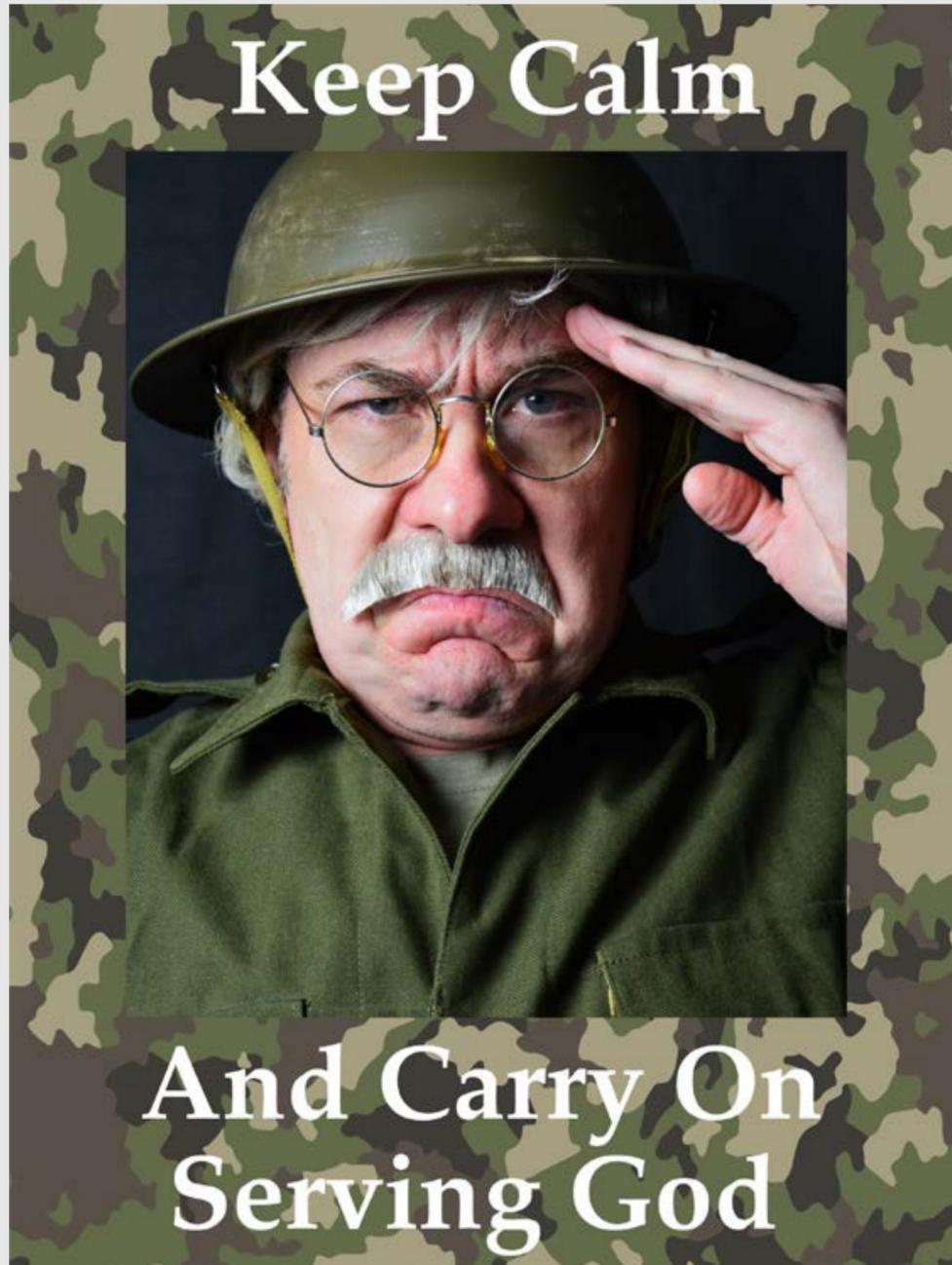
- A strong and united church.
- A prayerful church.
- A welcoming and outgoing church.
- A church that is growing in discipleship and fellowship.
- A church whose members are active in our community through TACT, Open the Book, Foodbank, Table tennis etc.
- Technically strong. Digital media, AV, etc.
- Loving unit. *"Blessed with good leadership."*
- Financially secure.

Weaknesses

- Lack of children and teens.
- Lack of live musicians.
- Many of our people are seniors and it can be difficult to find able volunteers for key roles.
- Smallish attendance numbers therefore:
 - * We could be intimidating to newcomers.
 - * People may feel unnecessarily pressured to fill roles.
 - * Need to plan ahead for what may happen when current vicar retires.



What is God Calling us to do in His service



One of the worst mistakes a church family can make is to fall into the trap of activism. Jesus said *“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”* He wants us to pause and have fellowship with Him.

Of course the equal and opposite mistake is sloth. However we were inspired in our planning by the Diocesan “next steps” project. Churches are being encouraged to work together and share resources.

It became apparent that St. Andrew’s congregations are fully embedded in service alongside other Christians in the area. We serve under the TACT umbrella in Foodbank, Debt support, Street and School pastors, and more. We partner with Redeemer church and Abby Chapel in Open the Book, and run a number of initiatives under our own banner. Such as, Table tennis, Back fitness, and pastoral support across the parish.

Therefore, we believe that God is telling us to continue supporting and encouraging our people to serve with others. We will do a few carefully chosen things ourselves and strive to do them well.

We will work through Occasional Offices and other contacts to serve and witness to our parishoners. And, we will work to ensure our church services are prayerful, accessible and uplifting.

In short, we will **“Keep calm and carry on Serving God”**.

So what do we do next?

To summarise, the main conclusion from our Church plan is that we are already on the right track. We need to keep on with confidence and certain in the knowlege of who we are and what we do.

But we must not and are not going to get complacent. So, going forward we will keep on listening to God and responding to His guidance.

Our current task list:

- Review the robustness of our technical infrastructure. Service, repair and/or update our projectors, sound and broadband systems.
- Continue to develop the area of publicity and communications. Weekly bulletins, announcements, Facebook and website.
- Develop our Thursday morning service with felowship and support time afterwards. Invite those who are struggling with personal traumas. Such as: berevement, marriage breakdown, loneliness and so on.
- Work on corporate prayer to enable more of us to take part.

