

Christchurch Abbeydale

Church Vision

Adopted at the Church
Meeting of 16th July 2025



**‘To know Jesus and to
make Jesus known’**

Christchurch was established in the 1980s as an ecumenical project sponsored by four Christian denominations – the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Churches – to provide a Christian presence in a new area of housing. ***Today, we aspire to build on these roots by nurturing the Church to become a vibrant and growing fellowship of Christ-like worshippers united in love and with a common vision to bring the good news of Jesus to the now established communities of Abbeydale and Abbeymead.***

We recognise that this vision can only be achieved by the active contribution of every single member of our fellowship, offering whole-hearted support and playing as active a part in its implementation as each person's circumstances allow. We also recognise the need not to overreach ourselves with too many initiatives but always to take the resources at our disposal into account. The success of our work is in God's hands and dependent on His timing, and this may mean the need for patience and perseverance on our part.

Our vision covers each of the key areas of Church life listed below.

1. **WORSHIP**

Leader: The minister

Sunday morning worship provides the focal point for the life of the Church and regular attendance is an expectation that comes with Church membership.

We have a strong belief in the power of the Gospel message and expect Biblical teaching to be prominent in our services alongside prayer and a varied musical offering. Our minister has a commitment to evangelical expository preaching, meaning that the sermon takes centre stage in many services. Sermons arise either from a common theme or from the lectionary. We celebrate

Communion on the third Sunday morning of each month, using orders of service from each of the denominations that make up Christchurch, and we have four all-age services a year. Services are shared on Zoom for the housebound.

Our minister is committed to making the content of sermons as measured as possible, while staying true to their Biblical message. A range of perspectives exists within the congregation, and the minister always welcomes feedback and 1-1 discussion on issues that arise from sermons, many of which are available as study aids on the Church website.

Seeking to maintain our ecumenical roots, we also have an expectation that worship will be varied in style. On almost half the Sundays through the year, worship is led by one of the three retired ministers who are part of our fellowship or by a visitor. Visitors are encouraged to bring with them aspects of worship that reflect their own denominational background.

To ensure our worship continues to develop, we are seeking to include more lay involvement (in leading prayers, providing instrumentalists or taking part in choirs on special occasions). We are also actively attempting to broaden the list of visiting worship leaders who can be called upon.

2. ECUMENISM

*Leaders: The minister and representatives
on denominational bodies*

Ecumenism is the principle of promoting spiritual unity and understanding among Christians from various backgrounds and denominations.

Given the special ecumenical nature of Christchurch, which was very evident at our recent anniversary celebrations, we are seeking

to ensure that:

- We have a good range of visiting worship leaders from each of the four denominations that make up Christchurch;
- The annual meeting of the Abbeydale Joint Council with Church leaders is supported and seen as a priority;
- 'Chronicle' and other forms of Church communication reflect our rich ecumenical awareness;
- Christchurch is made available as a venue for ecumenical meetings and activities;
- Christchurch should be represented at as many ecumenical events as possible (along the lines of our current involvement in the World Day of Prayer);
- Ecumenism will feature as an agenda item at future Church Meetings, when those appointed to represent the Church on regional denominational bodies will be invited to share news or updates.

As we are a Church which is currently seeing people join our fellowship and membership from a range of wider denominational and non-denominational backgrounds and people whose origins lie in various nations around the world, we now have the opportunity, which we welcome, to embrace an ecumenism that goes even wider than that of our four founding denominations.

We seek to work within the legal framework of the constitution we adopted in 2016, but will keep its content under review to ensure that it remains supportive of our vision for the Church. The formal structures that supported ecumenism and Christchurch as an LEP are now much looser than in the past, but our Church leaders have recently reaffirmed that their support for Christchurch remains undiluted. We are grateful for the financial assistance they provided with our recent windows and doors project.

3. WELCOME AND FELLOWSHIP

Leader: Alison Apperley

We aim to have a supportive fellowship within Christchurch which includes all our members and adherents and at the same time is welcoming to newcomers and visitors.

This we do through a well-established programme of monthly social events, which currently include:

- A series of Coffee and Craft Mornings;
- Sunday lunches of various kinds, a Ploughman's Supper at Harvest and a Christmas Meal;
- The Flower Festival;
- The Christmas Fair and a Carols and Flowers Evening;
- An annual Afternoon Tea;
- A Quiz and a Beetle Drive.

Everyone is very welcome at any of these events, including those with just a loose connection to the Church. Most of the events also raise funds for the Church or local charities.

Fellowship is further supported by several other groups and activities that meet at Christchurch on a weekly or a monthly basis such as our Warm Welcome, the Lunchtime Fellowship, Craft Circle, Keep Fit and the Walking Group.

The primary purpose of our fellowship events is to provide opportunities for people to meet socially, grow in friendship and form ties to bind us into a strong community held together by Christian love. They also aim to integrate into our family those who have joined the Church recently and act as a bridge to attract new people, helping them to develop confidence so that they may, if they wish, join us for worship.

We hope to encourage all Church members to become increasingly confident in offering friends and neighbours an invitation to the fellowship events that are organised.

4. PASTORAL CARE

Leader: Audrey Staite

Everyone at Christchurch has a role in pastoral care; we all have a responsibility for the well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ. A strong culture of informal practical support exists at all levels in the Church. Flowers from Church services are delivered on a regular basis as an expression of our love to those who are ill, have special needs or are commemorating an important milestone in their lives.

Our formal system of care is provided by those who serve as pastoral contacts (currently twelve in number). All Christchurch members and adherents have a designated pastoral contact, who is on hand to help new people when they join the Church, to offer advice to anyone on their list with a problem connected with the Church and to carry out home visits when required. If a confidential matter is shared with a pastoral contact, it is not passed on or discussed with anyone else without prior permission. The minister makes home visits to the housebound or to those with particular needs and may also offer home Communions.

To strengthen these arrangements, we are looking to encourage better communication within the Church so that pastoral contacts have the information they need to ensure that appropriate care is in place. We also hope that new people will volunteer to join the team of pastoral contacts.

That said, with many elderly members of our congregation, it is likely that pastoral care may be a challenge for the Church in the future. Limitations of time mean that not everyone can receive personal support from the minister on every occasion; we must make sure that the structure of pastoral contacts we have in place is valued and utilised as fully as possible.

5. EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

*Leaders: The minister
and Julia Clarkson*

We are living in a time ripe for evangelism; a recent report, 'Quiet Revival', published by the Bible Society, suggests that regular attendance at Church services nationally has risen from 8% to 12% over the last five years. Our approach is to try to engage with members of the local community who are looking for answers in a world beset by so much uncertainty and to share with them the rich blessings that follow from walking alongside Jesus.

We aim to have one weekend a year which is designed to inform and inspire the Church's work in evangelism. In 2025 this will take the form of a service and follow-up discussion led by the URC Synod's Mission Development Officers. We aspire to host at least one course a year that introduces people to the fundamentals of the Christian faith along the lines of an Alpha Course. We are also making more use of individual testimonies at Café Church and in other formats to share personal life stories and stimulate discussion.

As far as personal discipleship is concerned, we encourage the use of devotional aids, such as Bible reading notes, attendance at the Sunday evening 'Know and Grow' and participation in the Monday afternoon Bible Study group or the Thursday evening house group. We hope to increase the number of house groups in the future.

6. MISSION AND OUTREACH

*All Council members share
oversight of this area*

There are great opportunities at Christchurch for Christian service within the community. Ours is the only Church building in Abbeydale or Abbeymead, we occupy a strategic site close to other essential amenities and we have strong links with Heron and Abbeymead Schools.

We have identified the following as our priorities in mission and outreach:

- Warm Welcome, which provides an informal meeting place for people in the community, including some who have no other connection to Christchurch;
- Little Angels, our group which brings together pre-school children and their carers within a Christian setting during term time;
- Our work with schools, which includes Open the Book, Experience Easter and Experience Christmas and the assemblies and classes taken by our minister;
- Supporting the Foodbank on a weekly basis and in response to special appeals;
- Operation Christmas Child, for which we fundraise, prepare shoeboxes with gifts and host a community packing day;
- Local charities who are welcomed into our building at the Craft and Coffee Mornings and given opportunities to fundraise.

We intend to assess whether we can offer more specifically to attract young and middle aged adults, those in their 20s and 30s and those in the 40–60 age bracket. The starting point should be to identify expectations of Church that people in these age ranges may have and consider whether there is scope for new groups or activities to cater for some of their needs and interests.

Eco-Church initiatives have scope to enhance our local area and involve members of the community. Among ideas being discussed are working towards one of the A Rocha awards, planting a wild flower garden on the Church site, creating a bug hotel, having our own composter, establishing proper recycling facilities, using Fairtrade products and organising litter picking in the local area.

The Church also wishes to recognise the work that many members of our fellowship do as volunteers with other community-based organisations.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Leader: Gordon Dale

The overall aim of our work with children and young people is to bring the word of the Lord to them in ways they can understand, enjoy and take part in. In doing so, we set out to teach the children and young people important lessons for life and sow the seeds of God's Kingdom among them. If the children or their parents end up in Church on a Sunday, that is an added blessing which is God's doing, but it is not the immediate purpose of the work. The seeds we sow may not flourish for years.

Our work among children and youth who attend Christchurch centres on the following:

- Kidz Club meets during Sunday morning services and engages children of various ages with a range of activities based on Bible stories, teaching and craft work;
- The Boys' Brigade and Girls' Association, which meets at Christchurch on two evenings a week and supports the development of faith in its badge work and other aspects of its rationale;
- All-Age parade services on occasional Sunday mornings and two Café Churches a year led by members of the Boys' Brigade;
- Outreach programmes, which older members of the BB have access to, such as the Gloucestershire Youth for Christ 'Break Away Weekend';
- The recently established Spaces discussion group is following the format of a Junior Alpha Course.

Together with Little Angels and the work we do at schools, Christchurch touches the lives of dozens of local children and young people each week, which is something to be celebrated.

Given the resources at our disposal, we may already be doing as much as we can in this area, but we are looking to fit in an additional

parade service and are exploring our capacity to run a summer holiday club for primary aged children at some point in the future.

8. PRAYER

Leader: Val Stephens

The whole life, fellowship and mission of Christchurch and all its activities are underpinned by prayer. We recognise and value the power of prayer.

Our prayer life revolves around:

- The monthly 'Together in Prayer' meeting, at which we pray for all aspects of Church life as well as wider world issues;
- The prayer focus in 'Chronicle';
- The Prayer Chain, which prays for individuals from our fellowship who are experiencing difficult circumstances or have special needs;
- The prayer notice board in the Church vestibule and the prayer page on the Church website;
- Special events such as the annual World Day of Prayer.

We are looking to enhance our collective prayer life by encouraging more people to lead intercessions during services, providing more opportunities for individuals to receive prayers of healing, developing a prayer team to pray with individuals after a service or on other occasions, inviting new people to join the Prayer Chain, highlighting the existence of the Church 'prayer box', organising prayer meetings to support specific events and possibly having a prayer away day at some point.

We are also considering opening up the Church at a regular point in the week to provide a space for individuals to pray, possibly on a Monday morning when the Church is already open for Warm Welcome, or perhaps on a Wednesday afternoon before Communion.

9. COMMUNICATION

In order to bolster our fellowship and encourage successful events, we acknowledge the importance of good communication, both internally within the Church family and externally with the wider community. Communication needs to be more than simply advertising and should seek to convey something of the essence of life at Christchurch and the message we have to share about Jesus.

The principal means of communication we have include:

- The Church website, which is attractive and inviting and has scope for expansion;
- Our well regarded monthly 'Chronicle', which is distributed to all members and adherents and also made more widely available, for example, in the community bookcase at Morrisons;
- The weekly Church notice sheet and messages on our AV system;
- The Church Facebook pages, which can be shared among friends on Facebook;
- Advertising on local notice boards and in other Churches;
- Our Annual Report.

To extend our communication, we will be looking to increase the range of information shared through the Church website and ensure that 'good news' stories are shared with the wider community whenever possible. We will explore the possibility of making use of local radio. We will seek to improve the visual impact of our exterior noticeboards, attempting to enhance them with eye-catching posters to become wayside pulpits. We will also continue to value informal methods of communication such as word of mouth.

10. NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Each of the areas of development highlighted above are supported by the important work of a number of key individuals who make up the administrative platform of the Church, without which Christchurch simply could not begin to function, let alone have a vision for the future. These are:

- The Church Secretary;
- The Church Treasurer;
- The Property Steward;
- The Safeguarding Officer;
- The Pulpit Supply Secretary;
- and the Bookings Officer.

The smooth running of the Church is also reliant on those who carry out regular duties as stewards, welcomers, coffee makers, flower-arrangers and cleaners as well as those who put out chairs, buy materials for the Church, form part of the catering team or care for the outdoor spaces that surround our building.

Christchurch is a team effort, in which there is a role for everyone willing to serve.

CONCLUSION

We aim to take this vision forward by involving everyone in the Church and we ask for your active support and for your prayer for it to be blessed as we seek the mind of Christ and the empowerment of the Spirit.

Christchurch Abbeydale

Heron Way

Abbeydale

Gloucester

GL4 5EQ

Registered Charity No. 293684