

From our Vision Statement.

4. “being fully involved in and serving the needs of our local community”

Today we continue our series on the Vision Statement which we believe the Lord has given us as members of Holy Trinity to guide us in our distinctive life and work for Him.

Here is the fourth bullet point of the statement:

“We aim to be a community which follows the way of Christ by:

4. **being fully involved in and serving the needs of our local community**”. (It’s printed on today’s notice sheet)

As the document on our development plan explains, this is part of our Mission and Outreach, which includes *Global* justice and peace (which Tim will consider next week because it’s our 5th bullet point) and also *local* involvement in our community - today’s theme.

Why? Why does “**Mission and Outreach**” have such a prominent place in our Vision Statement? The first 3 points of the statement are absolutely basic but more inward looking

- our worship as a church,
- creating space for reflection and questioning, for spiritual renewal and healing,
- celebrating diversity, welcoming and accepting people as they are.

Basic, but we need to realise we are *sent out* (that’s what mission means), we are to *reach out* to our community, being involved in it and serving its needs.

It is a happy coincidence that the set Gospel reading from John chapter 1 holds the key. Jesus himself came, was sent, became incarnate, human, one of us, involved with us, to bring light and life – to meet our deepest needs. As his disciples, we also are to get involved, to get stuck into what is sometimes called ‘incarnational mission’. As Jesus said in John chapter 20, “as the Father has sent me, so **I send you**”. That’s the key answer to the ‘why’. We are now his physical presence on earth.

The disciples in the upper room must have been amazed and terrified by that assignment, as perhaps we are, so note the next verse – “he breathed on them and said ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”. (There’s a theme for another series of sermons!) But at least we can say with greater passion the prayer regularly used at the end of the service: “*send us out (mission us) in the power of your Spirit*”.

Where? What is our community? Partly we need to define it as our parish, the part of Oxford for which, in the Church of England system, we have a special responsibility. It includes Risinghurst across the by-pass and Wood Farm to the south. We do not have many links with Wood Farm, and I do not think many people from there come to worship here at Holy Trinity.

Therefore, we so much need to develop our work there. That's why the job spec for our new full-time curate who is coming in September focuses especially on fairly pioneer ministry on the Wood Farm estate; and it's rather appropriate that his name is... Alastair Wood!

Our community is also wider, because some of the projects we are or will be involved in – homelessness, Fair Trade shop, etc. may be beyond the parish boundary, and we need to remember we are members of Churches Together in Headington.

And, in a way our community is **wherever** we live and work and shop... wherever we are, as the Lord's people.

What? What are the needs of the community and of the people in it, to which we are to respond? Perhaps we need to ask them, to keep our ear to the ground, to take note of what others have found out. For example, I was surprised to read in the February magazine, in the article about the Emmaus homeless project in Oxford Road, Cowley, that "Oxford has one of the highest levels of homelessness in the country". Keep making the soup, bringing tins for the boxes at the back of church; and considering what else can we do or support?

And there are the deep personal needs in our community, as in any other – loneliness, anxiety, ill-health, bereavement, unemployment, breakdown of relationships, and so on, which can be met not just by the Vicar and other clergy and the pastoral team, but by all of us in our own situations. Lovingly, sensitively met.

Because this is part of our living according to the 2nd great commandment, to love our neighbours as ourselves. Our longing should be that in people's lives and in our community there may be signs of God's kingdom, signs of what God wills, pointers to what life will one day be like when God brings in his new heaven and new earth.

I have so far left out what the New Testament writers would consider as the biggest need of people around us. A relationship with the Lord. From John chapter 1 again: "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God". Life in the family. The dreaded E word (evangelism) may not be in our vision statement or the discussion document, but the theme is most certainly there!

So our mission is a response both to the *great commandment*, and to *the great commission* – “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

That’s why our development plan lists ideas for newcomers’ meals, short courses about the Christian faith, and ways to publicise better our church and its activities.

Yes, our church building is strangely invisible! But remember the church (and the reality of Jesus) will become visible through our lives, and most people will dare to come because we have invited them.

How? How do we become fully involved in and serve the needs of our local community? I have touched on a number of ways already. And you only have to look through the magazine or the weekly notice sheet to see the several obvious ways in which Holy Trinity members are wonderfully getting stuck in.

Here are 3 Ps to consider: politics, projects, personal.

It’s so important that some Christians are involved in the political scene where decisions can be made to greatly improve our community and city. It’s also good to play a major part in projects, only some of which will be church-based. For example, Oxclean in which next month many groups will clean up and tidy up many different parts of Oxford.

Personal. It should be the case that Christians make a *distinctive* contribution to politics and projects and so on by the kind of people they are and the values they hold to.

Some of you may have read that amazing article in the Times newspaper near the end of last year by Matthew Parris, a confirmed atheist, writing that Africa needs God and the impact of Christian missionaries. He says it is “sharply different from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts”. He goes on: “In Africa Christianity changes people’s hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.”

So, what about our *distinctive* personal contribution to projects and also to all our contacts with family, neighbours and so on? How would you answer the question: ‘what virtues or characteristics are needed in our community and culture at the moment?’ (Here’s another possible sermon series!) Perhaps we could include hospitality, patience, peacefulness, forgiveness, faithfulness and commitment, generosity.

We might validly see these as Christlike qualities, which is why, as we are again sent out today to get stuck into our local community, we pray for the resources of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

“Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.”