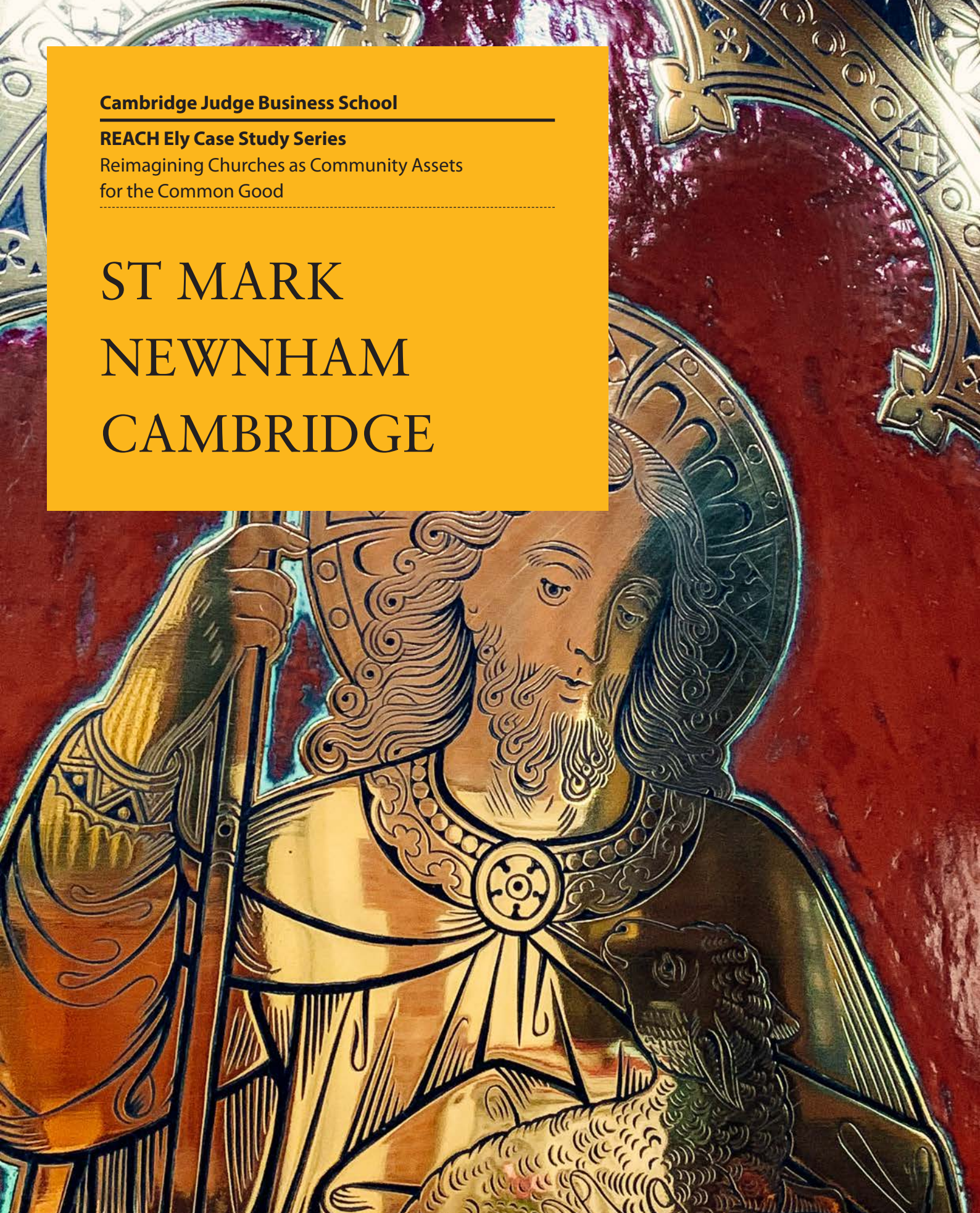


Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# ST MARK NEWNHAM CAMBRIDGE



*Text, design, photography*

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as  
Community Assets for the Common Good)**  
is a multi-partner research project that  
aims to help communities make fuller use  
of their churches.

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*The project is implemented by*

**Centre for Social Innovation at  
Cambridge Judge Business School  
and the Diocese of Ely**

*with the generous support of Allchurches Trust  
and Historic England*

**[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)**

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website [www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: Detail of the brass portrait of Jesus Christ with a lamb on the south wall of the church.*

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# ST MARK NEWNHAM CAMBRIDGE

**Church Category:** Urban

**Deanery:** Cambridge South

**Address:** Barton Road, Newnham,  
Cambridge CB3 9JZ

**Website:** [www.stmarksnewnham.org](http://www.stmarksnewnham.org)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** Modern red brick church; Fixed pews; Porch with glass doors; Separate community centre with kitchen and facilities; Car park

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 95 / 3,237

**Fund Raising:** Parish Appeal; Organ Restoration Fund

**Income Generation:** Rental income from church buildings and community centre; The *Seek* magazine advertising and sales; Church fete events

**Communications:** Church website; The *Seek* magazine; *What's On In Newnham* (Community Centre); Weekly pew sheet

**Community Engagement:** Community centre classes and talks; Concerts and drama productions in church building; Community tea; Community lunches; Visiting group; Church fete; Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project; Community survey.

# ROOTS



## Profile

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St Mark's is situated in Newnham, one of the most affluent Cambridge suburbs with a parish population of 3,237 (2016 census). Community facilities in the area include a public house, local shops, medical surgery, café and a nursery school. St Mark's was originally a daughter church of St Andrew and St Mary in Grantchester (See *REACH Ely Case Study: Grantchester*). After the population of Newnham increased, St Mark's became an independent parish in 1918.

## Building

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The church building, dating from 1901, is red brick construction that replaced a temporary small iron and timber structure which had served the village of Newnham since 1870. The buildings comprise the main church building, a purpose-built community centre in the rear courtyard, and a car park. Major renovations in 2002 added a new transparent narthex at the west end of the church to provide a more convenient entrance. The curved facade helps with traffic flow into the rear car park and new fenestration to the south and west allow more daylight into the church. Future alterations to the building may include adapting part of the vestry to become a small office for a community centre manager. The church is reasonably well off for finances, but it will have to use funds that people have donated to cover this plan.

## Artefacts

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The artefacts comprise a war memorial on the front lawn, a burial ground with memorial garden, and an adjacent wildflower meadow. The church organ, built in 1907, has recently been restored and modernised.



*Clockwise: The nave with pews; The transparent narthex; The glass curved foyer; The view of the church building from the courtyard; Mixed seating arrangement.*

# RUNNING

## Team

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The team comprises a vicar, two churchwardens, assistant priest, children and families minister, choir director, organist, treasurer, and volunteers.

## Religious Services

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The vicar and assistant priest shares duties with the parish church in Grantchester. On a fifth Sunday, joint service is hosted in either Newnham, St Andrew and St Mary (Grantchester), or St Mary and St Michael (Trumpington) (*See REACH Ely Case Study: Trumpington*). There is an 8 a.m. service (The Book of Common Prayer) and a 10 a.m. service every Sunday, and informal evening services on the second and fourth Sundays in the month.

**Messy Church:** Held after-school in the community centre for children to learn about the church through storytelling, craft, play and sharing a meal. Other services include: Carol service in mid-December; Crib service on Christmas Eve; Ash Wednesday; Holy Week and Easter; Ascension Day; Remembrance Service on Remembrance Sunday attended by local Scout groups; and the Annual evening service near All Souls Day to remember those who passed away.

## Parish Share

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The Parish Share expenditure in 2018 was £43,801.



*Centenary celebrations in the church and community centre (Photo by St Mark Newnham).*



## Fundraising

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**Parish Appeal** to raise funds to cover running costs: Each year in September, a copy of the *Seek* magazine is delivered to every household in the parish, including a letter from the vicar setting out what the church has to offer the community, and asking for financial support.

[Parish Appeal] yields quite a lot of money and that is why we always do it because there are quite a lot of people who do not necessarily come but support the church in a general way.

**Dr Eleanor Toye Scott**  
Churchwarden

## Organ Restoration Fund

The church was able to raise an impressive amount of money recently to restore its organ, both from members of the congregation and members of the wider community. The project to restore the organ and the bulk of the required fundraising was undertaken by Alan Jones, a longstanding member of the congregation who has been personally involved with fabric and buildings projects at the church over many years. The organ restoration was an ambitious project, but it captured the imagination of the community and was a great success.





*Panoramic view of the nave and the chancel with the organ.*

The Organ Appeal lasted from September 2012 to May 2015. The church raised £120,417 plus Gift Aid of £24,949 making it overall £145,366.

115 individuals donated £104,000 and 12 Cambridge colleges, trusts, local businesses and concerts donated the balance of £16,400. The work started in August 2014 and was fully commissioned in January 2015.

### **Income Generation**

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**Rental income.** Fees for use of church building and community centre by special interest groups; language, arts and crafts classes; dance and drama groups.

### **Communications**

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The church community publishes the *Seek* magazine monthly. Once a term, it also produces *What's On In Newnham* as a guide to Community Centre classes and activities. In addition, information about services and events are posted on the church website, posters on noticeboards in the entrance foyer, and published in newsletters and brochures.

# REACH

## Community

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**Community Centre.** The history of St Mark's shows that the church has always been made available for use beyond the congregation. In 1900, Rev Symonds put the Parish Room at the disposal of the "men of the district" to "meet once a month and discuss any question of interest". The Large Hall (originally The Parish Room) has always been used by the Newnham community for a wide variety of activities. In 1968, the Parish Room was officially opened after the construction of a kitchen, lobby, and cloakrooms. In 1976, the room was renamed into St Mark's Community Centre which offered, with the help of Coleridge Community Centre, a full termly programme of classes and activities.

The Community Centre is adjacent to, but separate from, the church thus permitting it to be used at the same time as the church building. The centre has a small lobby and seating area, one large and one small hall, a kitchen, and disabled and regular facilities. Further works were taken to improve facilities and meet health and safety and fire regulations. The lobby area with the armchairs and about two thirds of the kitchen were extended in 2014 thanks to funding from the Cambridge City Council. It was officially opened by the Mayor of Cambridge, Councillor Gerri Bird in February 2015.



*Top: The entrance to the Community Centre in the rear courtyard; Middle: The Community Centre's foyer and kitchen; Bottom: Facilities and the small hall.*

## Events

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The community centre hosts four types of events: (1) **church-related events**, e.g., PCC meetings, after church service refreshments, Junior Church, church youth group; (2) **community groups run by the church**, e.g. twice-weekly toddler group (Toddles), mums and babies' group; (3) **private hire** for parties, evening events, day conferences or training events; and (4) **hire to tutors** to run regular classes during term-time, e.g. yoga, Pilates, pre-school dancing, French, painting, Forever Active fitness for older people. Events are encouraged and help to build relationships between St Mark's and the community.

**Church Fete.** The biggest social event is the annual summer church fete. In 2018 the event raised more than £3,000. The fete raises funds from stalls, sales of plants, books, coffee, bakery products, and gift prizes. The fete is held in the garden of the church Vicarage, by kind permission of the current occupiers, the Volland family (The Revd Michael Volland is the Principal of nearby Ridley Hall theological college. He and his family regularly attend St Mark's and he occasionally preaches or leads services).

**Concerts and Classes.** Events in the church and community centre are attended by parishioners and other guests. The church invests in serving

the community more broadly by keeping the church open, participating in charity initiatives, and organising events. The strategy is to focus on supporting family and children-friendly activities and run a wide range of hobby and activity groups.

**Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP)** ([www.cchp.org.uk](http://www.cchp.org.uk)). St Mark's supports the Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project, which offers accommodation to homeless people who have been referred to it during the winter months. In its first year (2013/14), St Mark Newnham was one of several churches which provided a hot meal and overnight accommodation to homeless guests on certain dates over the winter. The Community Centre main hall and kitchen were used for this. However, in subsequent years, St Mark's did not offer accommodation, because it was felt that the location of the church was too far from the city centre, and because it was difficult to get the Centre cleaned up and ready for daytime classes and events afterwards. Members of the congregation continue to volunteer with the CCHP scheme at other churches, and it is usually promoted as a Charity of the Month at some point over the winter. Even though both CCHP and taught classes serve the community and generate income, they required delicate management of resources to ensure both are sustained.

## Engagement

**Community Survey.** The St Mark's church aims to increase the use of the community centre as much as possible and the plan is to expand and develop the provision of activities to serve children's work. To investigate community interest in the use of the community centre, St Mark's organised a survey in 2018. While the intention of the survey was to canvass opinion from the broader neighbourhood, most responses were from current users of the Community Centre, most notably the tutors of the existing classes. St Mark's continues to strive to find ways to reach and engage with the wider community.



*Top: The Frozen Fields play written especially for St Mark Newnham; Andrew Harrison's performance in Mr Darwin's Tree in the church; Middle: Centenary celebration and the Summer Fete; Bottom: Summer Fete and Messy Church activities (Photo by St Mark Newnham).*

“You have to tread quite carefully not to alienate people but at the same time try to gently encourage people to think about doing things a little bit differently. But it would be nice to reach out to a slightly wider cross-section of the population than we currently do. I think we’re struggling a bit with knowing how to do that because we feel like we’re reaching out into the dark.”

**Dr Eleanor Toye Scott**  
Churchwarden



# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

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**Asset Management.** Resources are required to efficiently manage both the church building and the community centre. The Community Centre committee is planning to appoint a joint church administrator and Community Centre manager role to overlook day-to-day running of the church and centre and also be responsible for managing the finances.

**Youth engagement.** The parish demographic profile is predominantly senior but also includes a significant number of young families. St Mark's has a thriving children's ministry and has recently started a youth group, which has about 17 members aged 9 to 13. Further, the large student population in Cambridge has little impact on St Mark's congregation. While the church does not aspire to be a "student church", the relative lack of younger adults without families means that, for instance, the St Mark's Choir has struggled to attract younger people.

**Changing demands on church funds.** Demands on church finances shift somewhat from year to year, for various reasons, including changes in who is being employed, changes in parish share, needs for expenditure on the buildings and so on. People are encouraged to give to the church regularly and to set up Gift Aid where possible, and this generates a significant income stream. When there has been a shortfall in church income, appeals for increased regular giving have not always been as effective as holding fundraising events. The church also often benefits from generous bequests by parishioners.

**Community attachment to church fixtures.** The wooden pews in the church building are part of the history of St Mark's and perceived by the community to be integral to its appearance and ambience. However, the wooden pews are less accommodating for young children and constrain how the space can be used. While the removal of the wooden pews would create opportunities for more flexible use of the space, this could impact negatively on the church ambience. At the moment there are no plans to remove the pews, but this is a change that might be considered in the future if a majority of the congregation approved.

**Community perceptions of the church and Community Centre.** The activities of both the church and the Community Centre mostly reflect the older, educated demographic profile of the parish. For example, there have been talks on local history, on the architecture of French and English cathedrals, regular high-quality drama productions, often on serious subjects, and many classical concerts. However, such activities may have less appeal to different demographic categories who might be put off, intimidated, or feel that there is nothing in the church that is of interest to them. The challenge is to attract new participants without alienating current members of the congregation or users of the Community Centre.

“It may be true that we have not got what they need at the moment; but we should be trying to find out what it is and providing it. But it is difficult for us to connect with people if they opt out before they even come in – so we need to find ways to be more available and welcoming to everyone.”

**Dr Eleanor Toye Scott**  
Churchwarden



### Lessons Learned

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#### To work in partnership

St Mark's shares some services with the German Lutheran Church, Shaftesbury Road. At Christmas, the annual carol service is held jointly with the German Lutheran Church, and the German church also invites the St Mark's congregation to its own Christmas fair and carol singing. In 2018, the church of St Mark and the German Lutheran Church held a special service of remembrance and reconciliation for the centenary of the end of the First World War, at the Shaftesbury Road church.

St Mark's also hosts Wolfson College Cambridge for their annual carol service every year, and Ridley Hall theological college for its annual leavers service.

#### To be open and responsive to change

The PCC strategy is to adapt as time goes on, particularly, if the way that the building and community centre are used changes. The main church building is made available as much as possible for those interested in the different aspects of the church, e.g., organ and choir practice. In 2017, in exchange for a financial donation, a visiting US choir used the church as a base and rehearsing space for three days.

#### To create a living church

To be welcome and open remains the vital part for a living church. While it can be difficult to become a community church, it is important to listen and not assume, i.e., getting to know the people and the community who live around and listening to the story of that community.



We are facing a generation of people who do not know that the church is there for them. So, the invitation and welcome is the key. We are here for everyone but, I am not sure that some think that way. I have emails from people asking if it is OK to come, and in my head I think, of course it is OK. But some do not necessarily feel that. We need to work *doubly hard* at invitation, and when people do come, to give a good welcome.

**Revd Rachel Rosborough**  
Vicar

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