

# RE-LAUNCHING CHURCH BE-LAUNCHING CHURCH

## a strategy to build kingdom community

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the closure of many church buildings for much of 2020 and 2021 – and yet, churches also found new ways to be open, often reaching more people than ever before. We found ways to worship together – and discovered new friends in an online community of grace. We rediscovered a renewed connection with one another and were reminded what it means to care for each other. We recognised the dedication of workers and volunteers, many of whom we hadn't really noticed before. We learned to appreciate being together – because we missed it – and we learned to value our lives, because so many people lost theirs.

And somewhere in the storm we also began to realise that the world was changing; our communities were changing; our expectations were changing; and some things we thought unshakeable began to look a little less certain. The world, it seemed, would be different when we finally re-emerged from the reality of the Covid Crisis – the shadow of which would surely last for a decade.

So what about Church? Should Church change too? Could Church change? With the prayerful passage of time, a vision came into focus of a kingdom community growing unconfined by the building: a kingdom community that intentionally extended a welcome to all; that was present as a physical and an online community; a community committed to caring for the vulnerable in Truro and far beyond Truro: a gospel community encouraging a pilgrimage of faith and gospel conversations - seeking to make new disciples of Jesus and to deepen the faith of established ones. The vision of a faith community growing around a church that regarded its building, not as something to protect from others, but as a gift through which to bless others.

So, what does that kind of Church need to look like? This mission strategy begins to answer that question.

## BACKGROUND

There has been a witnessing community of Methodist people at the heart of Truro city-centre for 200 years. Throughout that time the church here has sought to be a place of vibrant worship based upon a good quality musical heritage and a love of the preached Word. In the last 40 years, a number of church mergers within the Truro centre have contributed towards making Truro (with Tresillian) Methodist church numerical significant and missionally effective.

We have always tried to be a servant church and have regarded our extensive premises as a tool and vehicle for mission rather than a monolith to be protected unchanged as the needs around the church altered. So it was, for example that around the year 2000, an extensive modernisation programme was undertaken to the sanctuary area to allow for a more imaginative and varied use of the premises. This included the development of a community café.

A largely traditional city centre Methodist church, around 2010, the Church Council here enthusiastically welcomed an approach from a neighbouring rural Methodist community to merge as one church on two sites. Freed from many of the concerns of building and bills, the faithful fellowship of folk at Tresillian

chapel have been set free to thrive as a missional community – and the people of Truro congregation too have been blessed by the partnership of Christians as it has developed.

In November 2015 we agreed to make radical changes to our Sunday worship programme, introducing band-led contemporary styled worship in a service that preceded the long-established traditional organ and choir led service. This has served to bring a significant number of new people into the worshipping life of the church.

In the last few years, we have again considered the suitability of our building for mission and have begun a significant project to re-purpose and re-model the rear half of our site to provide a Community Hub to serve both church and community.

Truro Methodist Church has never been afraid of making significant decisions if, by doing so, we can better serve the Kingdom and the people that God loves. This framework mission strategy illustrates that guided by the Spirit, the Church is making bold decisions once again.

## **OUR MISSION STATEMENT** (last reviewed and accepted October 2020)

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

Truro (with Tresillian) Methodist Church, takes its place within the family of Methodist people and seeks to fulfil this calling

- within and beyond our city, circuit, county and national boundaries,
- within and beyond our traditional patterns of Church;
- within and beyond our Methodist tradition and heritage:
- in the physical and in the online world.

We are committed to working in partnership with others, wherever and whenever possible, for the growth of God's Kingdom and the expression of God's love.

We seek to express our calling in the following ways

- **Through WORSHIP:** we believe that the Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love
- **Through LEARNING AND CARING:** we believe that the Church exists to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care
- **Through SERVICE:** we believe that the Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice
- **Through EVANGELISM:** we believe that the Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ

We will prioritise the use of our finite resources in such ways as to encourage and enable us to further our calling as part of the church of Jesus Christ. It is the Church's intention to value every human being as part of God's creation and the whole people of God. At the heart of the Methodist community is a deep sense of the place of welcome, hospitality and openness which demonstrates the nature of God's grace and love for all. Our church communities are called to be places where the transformational love of God is embodied and life in all its fullness is a gift which is offered to all people. There are no distinctions based on race, gender, disability, age, wealth or sexuality, or any discrimination associated with this

## OUR EMERGING MISSION STRATEGY

In common with so many other groups with the community, the period of Covid-forced lockdown has provided opportunity, not only to develop new ways of being and serving but has also afforded a period of prayer and reflection about the kind of church we are being called to become in a changed world. We have been gifted a sabbatical from the way we have always done things, and the opportunity to see a developing mission for a changing world.

As we have waited on God, we began to discover that we were focussing less on the “could church survive?” kind of questions and more on the ‘how can we serve?’ ones.

- how do we build a world which is fair and kind and stands against injustice?
- And how do we help a nation grieve and heal its brokenness?
- And how do we serve those who will be economically disadvantaged by the outcomes of pandemic?
- how do we rebuild trust and hope and love?

And each time, we sensed that a Jesus-centred, missional community that attempted to live alongside every person, was a starting point through which to restore hope.

In prayer and preaching, some consistent themes emerged, and the Leadership Team became convinced that they reflected the direction that the Lord was calling us to travel together.

- We perceived a dilution of the boundaries between secular and sacred discovering afresh the truth that our discipleship is real and relevant in our work-a-day contexts as well as in our Sunday best!
- We rediscovered the notion of our ‘Kingdom’ mission in the world as a key expression of the life of Church: the Church as ‘ekklesia’ may be called together from community to worship, but is planted in community to transform. We are most authentically Church when we are disciples of Christ shaping community where we live and work.
- We have been reminded of our common humanity, recognising the worth of every person, uniquely created and loved by God. Church seeks to serve and bless the ‘whole’ person, not to compartmentalise into spiritual, physical and psychological: this was a division that Christ never made.
- We recommitted to stand against injustice wherever it was found: to tear down walls that divide, remove prejudice that oppress and build ever-larger tables that welcome.

## So, what does *that* kind of church begin to look like?



Well, amazingly, perhaps the start of an answer is found in an NHS initiative launched in November 2019 and adopted by the mental health charity MIND more recently. It is called “Five steps to well-being” and is described as “a set of evidence-based public mental health messages aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of the whole population” (New Economics Foundation).

The fully developed mission of Church is much more than a concern with mental health alone of course, and yet Jesus declared that he “came to give life—life in all its fullness.” God is concerned with the wholeness of a person’s life and living, and we as church should be too.

So, taking the ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ principles and adapting them slightly to our mission context – and we have a strategy for personal discipleship, wellbeing and the encouragement of kingdom community.

### FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

ADOPTED BY MENTAL HEALTH  
CHARITY  
**MIND**

1. **Connect**
2. **Be active**
3. **Learn**
4. **Give**
5. **Take Notice**

Individuals will of course be naturally more attracted to some aspects of the strategy than others, but our hope is that the ‘Five Ways’ programme can nurture Gospel conversations and kingdom living as we journey together – whether our heritage is within inherited models of church or outside them.

### FIVE WAYS TO A KINGDOM COMMUNITY

Worship & Fellowship  
Healthy Living  
Discipleship  
Stewardship & Service  
Spirituality

## (Way 1: Connect) WORSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

A healthy Kingdom community is a connected community: connected to God and connected to our neighbour.

### Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV2011)

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' and to 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matthew 22.37-39)

We are to be a connected community. Worship and prayer then, are central to our relationship with God; and fellowship central to our connectedness to each other and those around us. Koinonia is the GK word most often translated 'fellowship' in the New Testament. It described the sharing together in the holy things and in the deepest of ways. It is evidenced in the life of the early Church in which 'no one had a need'. Koinonia was a description of - and a way by which - the 'connectedness' of humanity was worked out. We are not intended to

### How can the Church begin to take this sense of dislocation seriously?

- **Worship**
  - online
  - physical
  - individual
  - small group
  - corporate
- **Pastoral Care:**
  - visitation
  - Telephone care
  - Letter writing
  - "Cup-Cake" Ministry
  - chat room/zoom
  - meal deliveries
- **Conversation**
  - Café context
  - "The Table" – see below
  - activity focussed
- **Small Group networks**
  - Physical
  - Online
  - 'Connect' Mission Network
  - Re: Zoom
  - Fellowship Groups
- **Support Groups and drop-in's**
- **Digital connectedness**
- **Social events**
- **Children and youth gatherings**

## CONNECT

There is strong evidence that indicates that feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world.

It's clear that social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages.

How do we encourage and enable people to 'connect' with one another?

live in isolation: and an emerging Kingdom-community takes seriously the commitment to overcome isolation and dislocation in society. Isolation is not only felt in physical loneliness, but can also be caused by that sense that a person feels that they don't belong or aren't valued. We can become isolated from each other, and isolated from God.

A kingdom community seeks to work develop a sense of belonging and reaffirms the value and worth of every person regardless of age, gender, relationship status, sexual orientation or faith.

## (Way 2: Be active) HEALTHY LIVING

It has become clear that a healthy balanced lifestyle is one of the greatest protections against physical and mental sickness and one way in which we can protect a proper work-life balance. In a Kingdom community we recognise the need to care for our lives as a whole, and so to be promoting physical wellbeing alongside spiritual and mental health is a key Kingdom aim. In the Creation story, God rested on the seventh day, and the idea of 'Sabbath rest' finds its place in the spiritual life of the people. Perhaps we have lost something of this in our protestant work ethic, when we behave as if the more busy, we are, then the more godly we are. A healthy Kingdom community will enable people to rediscover space, rest and healthy, life enhancing activity – providing not only opportunity for recreation, but quality time to build, rebuild and nurture meaningful relationships.

### How are we able to encourage healthy living as a kingdom community?

- **Encouraging healthy activity**
- sport and recreation activities, providing inspiration, ideas and support for every age group and each ability.
  - Truro Trundlers
  - Prayerobics
  - Muscle and Ministry (Circuit Training)
  - Chair based exercise
  - Indoor sports and games
- **Encouraging healthy eating**
  - Faith and Food
  - Hot Potato Fellowship
  - Working with Foodbank to create healthy food on a budget
  - Community Café – good for you, good for your neighbour, good for the world
  - Lunch Club
- **Encouraging a healthy balance**
  - Music for well-being
  - Walking Clubs
  - Gardening and outdoor activity
  - Music and singing
  - Creative writing
  - Art Academy
  - Book Club
  - Relationship enrichment opportunities
  - Spiritual support in the workplace
  - Creating space for family, for friends, for hobbies – and making this 'sabbath' experience part of God's gift to us.

## BE ACTIVE

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.

Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being.

But it doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good - slower-paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise.

## (Way 3: Learn) DISCIPLESHIP

The concept of 'life-long learning' has long been accepted into the secular world but is an excellent model of discipleship within the Christian context too.

We can never know everything there is to know of God's love, God's world or God hope for us: and so why settle for the incomplete? Jesus said that he came that we might have life in all its fulness (John 10.10). For us – as for him – that means that we immerse ourselves in far more than just overtly spiritual learning. A healthy Kingdom community will provide opportunities for people to explore faith and to growth in discipleship – but 'Life in all its fulness' is so much more than that alone. A Kingdom community delights to learn and discover together and as we enlarge and expand our understanding, so are spirituality grows too.

Paul encouraged the church at Philippi, to commit to exploring those things that build us up, that enlarge our understanding and knowledge.

### LEARN

Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the opportunity to engage in work or educational activities particularly helps to lift older people out of depression.

The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning, has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

### Exploring faith as a kingdom community

- 'access' courses such as Alpha, Christianity Explored
- worship and preaching
- The Gospel Table
- Bible Study (online and in person)
- The Methodist way of Life
- Methodist heritage
- faith sharing
- youth Bible discovery
- Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth
  - Centred in God,
  - Everyone an Evangelist,
  - Transformational Leadership,
  - New Places for New People,
  - Every Church a Growing Church,
  - Church at the Margins,
  - Digital Age Mission,
  - Young Evangelists,
  - Pioneers and Leaders

### Exploring new interests in a kingdom community

- learning to Garden
- DIY
- Car mechanics
- social games and pastimes.
- parenting groups
- money management
- Digital literacy

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4.8)*

Sometimes – often – this is about god-focused learning – but to limit ourselves to 'The sacred' is to miss so much of the blessing God has for us. So a kingdom community is a learning community: always growing; always developing; always discovering.

## (Way 4: Give) STEWARDSHIP AND SERVICE

“This pandemic has magnified every existing inequality in our society – like systemic racism, gender inequality, and poverty,” (Melinda Gates, The Guardian September 2020).

We read in the Old Testament that the LORD longs for his people to *“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly”*. We are called to stand against injustice, to protect the most vulnerable, and to be the voice of the silenced. We are to be good stewards of the planet, and responsible stewards of the resources God has given to us. Our lives are to be lived as a ‘thank you’ to God for his kindness and generosity, as we care for his world and the people he loves.

We give of our time, our talents and are money to build a kingdom community in which every life is valued. Sometimes that means that we give directly to the life and mission of the local church – if the local mission is to continue, then our local commitment must be serious- ; sometimes our focus is broader. But we honour God as we serve others.

### What does a justice-seeking kingdom community look like?

- Safeguarding
- Climate crisis
- Christian Aid
- Stewardship of financial resources supporting God’s work here and in other places
- Anti-racism
- Public Issues campaigning
- Foodbank
- CAP
- struggling for Social justice in every place
- raising awareness through education
- Amnesty
- partnering with Compassion UK, lifting children from poverty
- recognising our place in a World Church
- to take seriously a ministry of reconciliation
- working in partnership with local groups and organisations.

## GIVE

Participation in social and community life has attracted a lot of attention in the field of wellbeing research.

Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.

Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing.

## (Way 5: Take Notice) SPIRITUALITY

It was Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite Friar, who coined the phrase *'Practicing the Presence of God'*. In essence, he encouraged people to sense the reality of God around us all the time. So breathe, became prayer: activity became divine service.

As we develop our spirituality, we begin to remove the separations between the secular and the sacred in the world and recognise the fingerprints of God all around us.

What kind of community encourages everyday spirituality? What kind of community nurtures a sense of the Divine in all things, and at all times?

### What kind of programme keeps us alert to the presence of God in all things and in every person?

- Prayer spaces
- Reflective opportunities in the 'every day'
- 'The Methodist Way of Life'
- Nature walks and guided tours
- Breathing Space
- Resources for individual prayer
- Journaling
- Quiet Days
- Online and Physical worship
- Online and physical reflection spaces
- 'At the Table'
- 'The Table'

### TAKE NOTICE

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can strengthen and broaden awareness.

Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your well-being and savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities.

Heightened awareness also enhances your self-understanding and allows you to make positive choices based on your own values and motivations.

Take some time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you.

## THE TABLE

If there is one idea that has marked our time in lockdown it would be 'The Table'. We have committed time and time again to tear down walls that divide and create a table that welcomes. If we have more than we need, we don't hoard it for ourselves, we just make a bigger table. The Table is a symbol and sign of Gospel: of the new family that God in Christ is seeking to build. The Table has become for us a sign of Kingdom.

So, at the heart of our Kingdom community - as a physical commitment to, and a visible sign of, the lessons we have learned in this season - we will create a Gospel Table! Outside the Church in a prominent, public space, we build a seriously robust and hefty Table with benches around it. The Gospel Table will become the enabling space for faith conversations, community engagement and being a people on pilgrimage.

Who knows, maybe once a week we load it up with food and just see who will come to eat and talk. No agenda, other than an invitation to The Table.

- Perhaps The Table becomes the place where Messy Church gathers.
- Perhaps it's the place where Coffee and Conversation flow.
- Perhaps it's the holy space where bread and wine are broken.

As long as it is FREE: as long as anybody and everybody is welcome, it really could become a Gospel Table.

## Truro Community Hub

As this mission strategy has developed, so too has the prospect of the Truro Community Hub – a partnership project in which the rear half of our site is repurposed to become a welcoming, flexible and modern centre for community and church use.



It is a hugely ambitious project, that was first imagined back in 2017, but which came to life during lockdown in the summer of 2020. If ever there was an illustration that closing the building did not close the church – then this is it. When we could not meet in person; when the myriad groups and individuals who normally use the premises were prevented from doing so – it was then that the life breath came into the Hub project! The Hub has already attracted a significant funding commitment from the Government's Town Fund and the hope of further grant support is very real. So why then, is news of the Truro Community Hub, confined to the closing pages of this paper and not on page 1? Quite simply because it is so central to the unfolding mission plan, that it could have been included on every page and in every section. It will be the resource to enable the fulfilment of so much of this strategy: even though so much will happen before the Project is completed.

It will be the place

- where the hungry can be fed;
- where the isolated can meet and find companionship;
- where young people can be safe, secure and cared for;
- from which the Foodbank can serve;
- and Street Pastors can minister;
- where new discoveries can be made;

- where health can be promoted.;
- where coffee can be drunk
- where work can be completed
- and meetings can be called to order
- where healthy living can be shared
- and new discoveries made
- when digital connectedness grows
- and armchair exercise is enjoyed
- where Gospel conversations can begin; and God can be met.

The Truro Community Hub is for us, everything we hope for the Gospel Table, writ large and in glorious technicolour. And so we resist thinking of the Hub development as a building project, it is a mission statement. It is not something to be hoarded by a church that looks away from its community, but part of the gift of a church offered to that community. The Truro Community Hub is our commitment to a mission strategy that is community focussed, spirit guided, and transformational.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What is offered here is nothing more than a basic outline of how these 5 principles might be used as a framework for a developing mission and discipleship agenda. There is much that you can add – and much that we have yet even to imagine. But it is possible perhaps to imagine the ‘Five Way’ programme becoming the measure against which we gauge new projects and ideas: a way to assess the credentials of an idea and a reminder of what we are trying to achieve.

- a kingdom community that is constantly surprised by grace and responsive to the Spirit:
- a kingdom community that encourages gifts and graces in everyone, especially those who do not believe that they have them!
- a kingdom community that works courageously for a fair world and stands defiantly against injustice and evil wherever it is found.
- a kingdom community that offers an ever-expanding gospel table
- a kingdom community that is about people not structures
- a kingdom community where traditional boundaries of geography and form, no longer apply
- a kingdom community where love of Jesus – or sanctified curiosity even – binds us together as disciples, rather than the place we live or the way we belong to do things
- a generous community
- a kind community
- a welcoming community
- a community to which everyone is invited to belong – and that starts a conversation about grace
- a community that makes a difference in the world and so honours the God who gave his son for it