

GOD'S
EMPOWERING
PRESENCE

Christ Church Home Groups Autumn 2012 Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long

Psalm 25:4-5

This year our theme verse has focussed on the importance of knowing God's way, rather than doing what we think is right. It is only as we seek God's direction, both for ourselves as individuals and for us as a church, that we can hope to live in a way which pleases him.

But of course, knowing what is right is one thing – putting it into practice can be a different matter. In fact, if we had to rely on our own strength and will-power, knowing what God wants us to do would just leave us feeling failures.

But God not only guides us, he helps us. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us to live as God's people. And this term, we will be thinking about how the Holy Spirit is God's Empowering Presence in our lives and in our church.

The diary for this term looks like this:

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Wed 5<sup>th</sup> Sept – Prayer Meeting
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w/b Mon 10th Sept – Home-group 1

w/b Mon 17th Sept – Home-group 2

w/b Mon 24th Sept – Home-group3

Wed 3rd Oct – Prayer Meeting

w/b Mon 8th Oct – Home-group 4

w/b Mon 15th Oct – Home-group 5

w/b Mon 22nd Oct - Free Week (Half-term)

w/b Mon 29th Oct – Home-group 6

Wednesday 7th Nov – **Prayer Meeting**

w/b Mon 12th Nov – Home-group7

w/b Mon 19th Nov – Home-group 8

w/b Mon 26th Nov – Home-group 9

Wednesday 5th Dec – Advent Informal Communion

I. NOT ALONE

WELCOME

Where is the best place you have travelled to?

WORSHIP

One of the best known passages in the Bible is Psalm 23, which talks about God being like a shepherd. It reminds that he guides us, he restores us, and that even in the darkest of times he is with us. Use the psalm together to praise God for his presence and his love.

WORD

Luke's gospel records the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It ends with his ascension, as he returned to his Father. But that isn't the end of the story. Luke starts his second volume — which we call 'Acts' — by saying that his first book was about what Jesus 'began to say and do'. Acts (and indeed the epistles and the rest of the New Testament) is the continuation of the story of Jesus. Jesus is still alive — and he is still at work. This term we will be looking at what the New Testament tells us about the continuing story of Jesus, and how we fit into it.

Read Acts 1:1-11

Why was it important that after he rose Jesus showed himself to the apostles and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive?

In a sense all the disciples of Jesus can claim that he has chosen us, revealed himself to us, commissioned us as his witnesses, and given us his Spirit. But these things were especially true of the apostles – those who were personally called by Jesus and were eyewitnesses of his ministry. Today it is through their witness that we are guided in our discipleship.

In verse 6, how does the disciples' question show that they haven't understood the kingdom that Jesus had set up?

➤ What do you think that 'the kingdom of God' means?

The primary way that Jesus equipped the apostles was the promise of the Holy Spirit. What was going to be the result of the Holy Spirit coming on them?

How does this promise apply to us today?

Read John 16:5-15

- Why was it good for the disciples that Jesus was going away (v.7)?
- ➤ What did Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would do when he came (v.8-11)?

- ➤ How could he do this more effectively than Jesus?
- ➤ It is sometimes said that we can't be sure whether the gospels are accurate. How does what Jesus says in v.13-14 help us to be confident about what we read in the New Testament?

Read John 21:1-14

- ➤ How were the disciples affected by Jesus' resurrection?
- > Did the resurrection alone transform them?
- What does that tell us about the importance of the Holy Spirit?

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Paul's main passion was to preach the gospel. (see 1 Cor.1:17) And this was at the heart of the Lord Jesus' commission to his disciples – to be his witnesses.

Look at the end of the book of Acts, and you will find that it doesn't have a real ending. That is because whilst with Paul the gospel had reached Rome, the heart of the empire, the task of taking the good news to the ends of the earth is still going on.

How can your group be involved in carrying on this commission by being witnesses in our own area? What practically can you do this term, both in prayer and in action?

2. RESOURCING THE WORK

WELCOME

What is your most treasured possession?

WORSHIP

'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights' (James 1:17)
Thank God for all the good things he has given you.

WORD

We saw last time that immediately before his ascension, Jesus commissioned his disciples – But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) It was a huge challenge, and in order for it to be fulfilled the disciples, and all who followed after them, would have to give both time and money to resource the work.

Following our Gift Day on Sunday, this week in home group we are thinking particularly about giving our money – but before we do, let's take a step back.

Read Matthew 6:19-24

In v.24, the word translated 'Money' is 'Mammon' – which in Jesus' time was shorthand for the god of material wealth, and for worshipping wealth, rather than money itself.

- > Why is it impossible to serve God and Mammon?
- > In what ways are you tempted to serve Mammon?

In Matt.6:19-20, Jesus draws a distinction between storing up treasures on earth and treasures in heaven.

What sort of things do you think he meant by 'treasures in heaven'?

God is concerned with every part of our lives, and as Christians we are called to use all we are and all we have for his glory.

The money we give to resource God's work is just part of this stewardship of what he has first given us. But it is an important part!

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Paul is writing about the Christians in Macedonia.

- ➤ What does he say about their circumstances?
- And about their giving?

- ➤ How did they understand their giving? (v.4-5)
- ➤ How does v.7 show how seriously Paul took giving?
- ➤ Why might we find it more desirable to excel in faith, speech, and knowledge (v.7) than in giving?
- How does v.9 provide a motive for giving?
- How might thinking about this affect your own giving?

Read Luke 19:11-27

Giving isn't just a matter of money (though our attitude to our money often shows a lot about our attitude to God!)

In what other ways can we resource the work God has called us to here?

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

As we saw last time, we are still fulfilling this commission – we are witnesses to the ends of the earth (well, to Moreton anyway!)

God has placed great opportunities before us here – but to grasp those opportunities will require wholehearted commitment. Talk and pray about ways in which you can help to resource this work, both in terms of money, and in terms of using the gifts you have.

3. I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

WELCOME

When you were at school, what was your favourite subject? And what subject did you find hardest?

WORSHIP

The Psalms give us many 'pictures' of God – he is our Shield (Psalm 18:2), our Shepherd (Psalm 23), our light (Psalm 27:1), our Refuge (Psalm 46:1), and our Rock (Psalm 95).

Take some time to meditate on these – and then praise God for what these pictures tell you about him.

WORD

Pentecost is one of the greatest days in history – the day the Holy Spirit was given to the church. Of course, the Holy Spirit is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, right back to the creation in Genesis 1.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit was given to certain of God's people to equip them for a particular task. But Pentecost marks a new era, when the Spirit is given to all Christians. And it is an important event to remember, because without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be impossible, and the church could not exist. As John Stott

puts it 'As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead'.

Read Acts 2:1-13

The disciples were together, when they heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind, and they saw what looked like tongues of fire.

Why might wind and fire be symbolic of the Holy Spirit?

Anyone doing the reading in church on Pentecost Sunday has the worry of negotiating their way through the list of nationalities in Acts 2:8-11!

Why do you think that Luke emphasises the international, multilingual nature of the crowd?

The day of Pentecost symbolised a new unity in the Spirit transcending racial, national and linguistic barriers. Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.

Read Ephesians 5:8-21

Paul contrasts two ways of life – darkness and light.

- What is the big difference between the two?
- Are there things which you used to consider to be alright before you were a Christians, which now you see are wrong?
- > If so, what caused you to change?

In the N.I.V. verses 19-21 look like a series of separate commands. But in the Greek in which this letter was first written they are linked grammatically to verse 18, and describe 4 results of being filled with the Spirit (literally:

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go on being filled with the Spirit;
speaking to one another ...,
singing and making music in your heart ...s
giving thanks ...
submitting to one another ....
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 Why would each of these flow from being filled with the Spirit?

In his book 'Keep in step with the Spirit', Jim Packer says, 'The Christian's life in all its aspects is supernatural; only the Spirit can initiate and sustain it.'

In what areas of your life have you been aware of the Spirit's work?

I guess that we would tend to answer this by thinking about obviously 'Christian' things, like church, worship, evangelism, healing.

➤ But have there been ways in which the Holy Spirit has affected your family life? Your work life? Your leisure activities?

WORK

The disciples had to wait for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:4). We no longer have to wait, because although his coming was a unique and unrepeatable event, all the people of God can now benefit from his ministry.

Pray for one another in your group, that the Holy Spirit will equip and empower you for the work that Jesus has for you here in Moreton.

4. THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE

WELCOME

Of your five senses, which is most important to you and why?

WORSHIP

As we saw last time, without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be impossible, and the church could not exist. Praise God for the work of his Spirit in your life. You might like to use the hymn 'Breathe on me, breath of God' (Songs of Fellowship 47) to lead you into your study.

WORD

It is sometimes said that if God removed his Spirit from the church, 90 % of what we do would continue unaffected. But this is very different from the picture that the New Testament gives us. It was the Holy Spirit who brought the church into existence by his coming on the day of Pentecost. And still today, without the Holy Spirit, any church would cease to exist. It is important to realise that the Holy Spirit isn't only at work in the spectacular (though Pentecost showed that he certainly does work in that way) but also in all the 'ordinary' aspects of Christian life.

Last time we looked at Acts 2:1-13. Now we move on through the chapter.

Read Acts 2:14-41

(This is a long passage, so if you just want the key sections read v.14-21 & 38-41)

- ➤ How does Peter explain the amazing events that have taken place at Pentecost?
- ➤ How does what happens when Peter preaches fulfil both Joel's prophecy and Jesus commission to the apostles in Acts 1:8?
- What do you think is the most significant act of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost?

Read Acts 4:23-31

- ➤ What did the believers pray for v.29-30)?
- What happened when they were filled with the Holy Spirit?
- ➤ How was this an answer to their prayer?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

- ➤ Why do so many people who hear the gospel still not believe? (see 1:18, 23)
- ➤ What makes us different from them? Is it that we are more perceptive? Or that we are just better people?

Paul says that his preaching was 'with a demonstration of the Spirit's power' (2:4).

➤ How does what he says in 1:18 & 1:24 about the power of God help to explain this?

Read Romans 8:1-17

➤ What is the fundamental difference between a Christian and a non-Christian? (v.9)

In the Old Testament God gave the law, but merely knowing what God expects didn't enable his people to live it out?

- What has God done now? (v.1-4)
- ➤ What do you think Paul means by 'living according to the Spirit' (v.4)?

In v.9, Paul says, not that we *should* be controlled by the Spirit, but that we *are* controlled by him.

- ➤ How does that fact encourage us in our Christian lives?
- How does what Paul says in this passage set us free from fear?

WORK

Part of our Vision at Christ Church is that we are to be an Evangelising Church. But, as we've seen in this study, ultimately it is only the Holy Spirit who can bring someone to new birth. And so evangelism has two dimensions. On the human level, we need to plan our evangelistic activity — and it would be good if your group were able to start planning some event which you would like to invite non-Christian friends to. But at the same time, we need to be praying that the Holy Spirit will be at work through us, convicting people of sin and drawing them to Christ. Spend some time planning and praying.

5. CALLED TO SERVE

WELCOME

If you had to choose an animal to represent you, which one would you choose?

WORSHIP

Read / sing or listen to Graham Kendrick's song 'The Servant King' (From heaven you came).

Praise God for the things that it tells you about Jesus.

Thank God for times when other Christians have served you.

WORD

It has been said that a church can be like one of two types of ship. The first is a pleasure cruiser, where there are a few in the crew, and the rest are passengers. The second is a battleship, where everyone has a job to do, and the whole crew work with each other and for each other.

Paul's picture of the church is definitely one which means we should be like a battleship. But – how close is Christ Church to that sort of picture?

Read Acts 5:1-11

A bit earlier, in Acts 2:42-47, Luke gives us a picture of the very earliest church, freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, and committed to teaching, prayer, worship, and to fellowship. One way in which they expressed their new found fellowship was in selling their possessions to support one another materially.

Now look at the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

- > What do you think was so serious about what they did?
- ➤ What do you think Peter meant when he said that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit?

Read Romans 12:1-8

- ➤ Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of *living sacrifices* to describe our response to God's mercy?
- J.B.Phillips famously paraphrases v.2 as 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.'
 - In what ways are we influenced to conform to the world, especially in the way we treat others?
 - ➤ How can the realisation that we are members of a body (v.3-8) prevent us from thinking too highly of ourselves (v.3)?

We are members of one body, and 'each member belongs to all the others', or to put it another way 'we are all dependant on one another'.

- In what ways can this belonging to one another be shown within Christ Church?
- In what ways are you dependant on others in the church?
- And In what way are they dependant on you?

Paul continues by listing some of the ways in which we need each other (v.6-8). He reminds us as well that these are 'gifts' from God – the tools for the job which God gives us. More of this next time, but for now look through this list.

➤ Why is each gift necessary?

Read Romans 12:9-21

- ➤ What should be the basis of all our relationships in the church?
- ➤ The list in v.9-16 of the ways in which we should function as a body is quite challenging! Which do you find hardest to do?

'From heaven Christ uses Christians as his mouth, his hands, his feet, even his smile.' (Jim Packer in 'Keep in step with the Spirit') In what ways can you do these things for one another?

6. EQUIPPED TO SERVE

WELCOME

What is the best thing that someone else has ever done for you?

WORSHIP

Praise God for times when you have been aware of him being at work in your life. Especially thank him for any times when he has used someone else to help you or encourage you.

WORD

The mission facing churches today is formidable. And yet the church has all the resources it needs at its fingertips. Our greatest challenge is to encourage every member to use the gifts that God has given them in the work he has made them part of.

The last 30 years has seen a lot of teaching and not a little controversy about 'the gifts of the Spirit', yet there has been surprisingly little progress towards genuine 'every member ministry'. I think that the main reason for this is that the individualism of society has made its way into the church, so that subconsciously we think of 'my gift', or "my ministry', or 'my right to exercise my gift in the way I think is right'.

This is a far cry from the New Testament picture of the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts.

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

- > Why does God give us gifts? (v.10)
- ➤ What is their ultimate purpose? (v.11)

Hospitality (v.9), speaking, and serving (v.10) are all very ordinary activities.

➤ What is it that makes them spiritual gifts?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

What do these verses teach us about the unity and diversity of spiritual gifts?

In v.8-11 Paul lists 9 of these gifts. Members of the group might like to mention any experiences that they have had of gifts which might come under these headings, but don't get bogged down in details – despite what some people say we don't know exactly what several of the terms Paul used actually mean. His emphasis here is on 'one Spirit, many gifts' – a subject we will come back to in a later session.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

- ➤ How does Paul again emphasise the diversity of gifting?
- Since Paul has been stressing that all gifts are important (v.21-26) what do you think he means by 'the greater gifts' (v.31)?

➤ If gifts are given for building up the church, not for personal satisfaction, what gifts do you think are most needed in Christ Church at the moment?

This can all get very theoretical. Take some time to compile a list of gifts (see earlier for some other passages in the Bible which mention them, but remember that nowhere does the New Testament suggest that these are exhaustive lists – so please don't be restricted to them – think wide!

- ➤ How might each of these gifts be useful in Christ Church?
- Are there gifts on this list which we need, but don't at present appear to have?

The New Testament is clear that every Christian has the Holy Spirit living in them, and that the Spirit equips each Christian for ministry. What gifts do the members of your group think they might have? Are there gifts which you can see in each other?

How can these gifts be used to serve others within Christ Church?

How should the church test these gifts?

7. SHARING IN HEALING

WELCOME

What is your favourite television or radio programme, and why?

WORSHIP

The Psalms are a wonderful source of praise and prayer – in fact the book of Psalms might have been compiled in its present form after the Exile as the hymn book of the temple in Jerusalem.

Read Psalm 103 together – and then use the things it praises God for as a basis for your own praise (you might like to use certain verses as your prayer)

WORD

At the end of each service each Sunday there is the opportunity to have someone pray with you for whatever reason you have – maybe to give thanks with you for something God has done for you; maybe to seek God's help in a difficult situation. And maybe to seek for God's healing for an illness.

In this 'prayer ministry' we seek to minister God's grace. God is sovereign – everything and everyone is ultimately in his hands. That means we can never force God's hand, but, trusting in his love and power, we can ask him to come into whatever situation someone may be in, and to bring his gracious touch. We might not know in

what way God wants to work in that person's life, but we can know that he does want to.

Read Romans 8:18-39

- > Why is it often difficult to feel like glorious conquerors?
- In verses 18-27, how does Paul describe the troubles that we have in the present time?
- ➤ In these difficulties, how does the Spirit's help encourage us? (v.26-27)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son Romans 8:28-29

What is God's good purpose for us?

In v.17 Paul says that we must share in Christ's sufferings in order to share in his glory.

➤ How does this passage help us to understand what that means?

In his earthly ministry Jesus healed many people (26 are recorded in the gospels) After Pentecost, the New Testament contains more accounts of people being healed in Jesus' name (e.g. the cripple at the Beautiful gate – Acts 3:1-10), but also of people not being healed (e.g. Trophimus – 2 Tim.4:20)

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

No one knows exactly what Paul's 'thorn in my flesh' was, though most commentators say that it is most likely to have been a physical problem. In one sense what it was is not important, what matters is the way the Lord responded to Paul's prayer that he take whatever it was away.

- ➤ Have there been times in your life when God has not done what you asked him to?
- ➤ Have you had any experience of God's power being shown through your weakness (v.8)?

Read James 5:7-20

James here lists several things we should (and shouldn't) do for each other.

v.9 – don't grumble against each other v.14 – call the elders to pray for the sick

v.16 – confess your sins to each other v.19-20 – Restore those who have fallen into sin

Why do you think James brings each of these together in this passage?

The elders of the church (v.14) in one sense represent the church, so as they pray for the sick person they do it on behalf of the whole church. This is the basis for our prayer ministry team – the members are commissioned by the church and represent the church as they pray with and for people.

➤ Have you had any experience of being prayed for by our prayer ministry team?

Although v.15 is a lot more complicated than it at first sight looks, it does give us the assurance that as we minister to others, God is at work.

WORK

Praying for one another is an important part of our home-groups, and an important part of our church. Yet still sometimes people are reluctant to ask for prayer from others. Even within our homegroups there might be some reluctance to pray for each other.

What could you do to encourage one another to give and receive prayer, and to expect God to be at work through this?

8. ONE FOR ALL

WELCOME

If you could be part of any group (maybe a world class orchestra, or international sports team etc.), what would it be?

WORSHIP

Imagine what it would be like to have to live in isolation from other Christians. Praise God for making you part of his church, and for the brothers and sisters he has given you. And pray for those Christians who have to go long periods without fellowship with other Christians.

WORD

There are both big differences and big similarities between our world today and the world of the New Testament. Probably one of the biggest differences is that our society is much more individualistic than the one the first Christians lived in.

One way in which we see this individualism is in the emphasis on 'my rights', on 'doing things my way', and on 'having my needs met' – all slogans of our society. Surveys show that most people choose to do things (or not to do them) depending on what they expect to get out of them.

This easily spills over into the church, but it is so different to the picture that the New Testament gives us. Because New Testament Christianity is much less about what I get out of it, and much more about what I can put into it. It is not about me as an individual, but about us as a church. (In fact, in the New Testament, the idea of a Christian who was not an active part of a church would be a contradiction in terms!) All that we have explored over the past few weeks about the work of the Holy Spirit, and about the gifts he gives, is rooted in the church – we are given gifts to use for others.

Read Acts 6:1-7

- Why was it important that the workload in the early church was shared out?
- > Do you think that the ministry of the word and prayer that the apostles devoted themselves to was more important than the other work?
- > What was the result of this sharing of the work? (v.7)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Paul's concern was that the Corinthians should not see themselves as a body of *individual Christians* performing *their own* ministries, but as members of *the body of Christ*.

➤ What might make some members of Christ Church feel useless or envious of other parts of the body?

- ➤ Have you ever felt this way?
- ➤ How does Paul respond to those who feel as if they don't matter in the church? (v.14-20)
- ➤ What might make some members of the church feel self-sufficient or superior? (v.21)
- ➤ How can we make every part of the body feel special? (v.21-26)

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Paul lists 4 ministries which God has given to the church (v.11-12). What is their purpose?

There is some uncertainty about what exactly these ministries involve, but the general idea seems to be:

- ❖ APOSTLES Witnesses of the resurrection, and the authority behind the books of the New Testament.
- PROPHETS Those who speak God's words to others or to the church.
- EVANGELISTS Those who are able to explain the gospel in such a way as to bring others to repentance and faith.
- PASTORS & TEACHERS Those who help others understand and apply what the Bible says.

- ➤ Why is each of these important?
- Why should 'works of service' lead to spiritual maturity (v.12-13)?

Think of the list of gifts you compiled a couple of times ago.

➤ How can we make sure that they are used in such a way as to build unity?

WORK

In session 5 you began planning and praying for some event to which you could invite your friends. How is it going?

9. MAKE LOVE YOUR AIM

WELCOME

If you were shipwrecked on a desert island, what one luxury would you want to have with you?

WORSHIP

'God is love' (1 John 4:7& 16) Praise God for the love he has shown you – especially for any times when you have been particularly aware of his love. Especially thank God for Jesus – 'This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.' (1 John 4:9)

WORD

Perhaps the most abused phrase in the English language is 'I love you.' Instead of communicating unselfish caring, if often expresses self-interest, manipulative affection, or sheer lust. As my Ethics tutor used to say, "I love you" can easily mean "I love me and want you." In this concluding session of our series, we will be thinking about the importance of love. But, to start, try writing a definition of love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13

It would be impossible to think about love without turning to one of the most famous chapters in the Bible. It is so often used as the Bible reading at Weddings – but, of course, it wasn't written about weddings, but about life in the church.

➤ Why is love so important?

1 Corinthians 13 is set in the context of what Paul is writing about gifts. In the 3 other major passages in the New Testament which deal with spiritual gifts, the need for love is also stressed (see Romans 12:9; 1 Peter 4:7-11; Ephesians 4:2)

- ➤ Why do you think that Paul is so keen to stress the importance of love in the context of spiritual gifts?
- ➤ How does what Paul says in v.1-3 show the effects of gifts used without love?
 - ➤ How can we know whether our own ministries are marked by love or by lovelessness?
- How does Paul define love? (v.4-7)
 - Which of these aspects do you find most challenging?

How can the love Paul writes of here lead to a healthy interdependence in our relationships within Christ Church, rather than individualism?

WORK

We have reached the end of this series. Take some time to share what you have learned from it.

Are there gifts that you have identified, or new ways in which you should be involved in Christ Church?

'Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory'

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

We want to be a Welcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him.

an Evangelising Church

Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear the

Good News of Jesus

a Loving Church

Because Jesus commanded his followers

to love one another

a Learning Church

Because we are in the business of making disciples, and disciples must always be learners