

# High Street Methodist Church

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## Harpenden

### The values that shape us

Christ-centred discipleship

Other-centred care

Non-judgemental welcome

All-embracing unity

Outward-focused service

Authentic witness

## A REPORT OF OUR General Church Meeting **VISION DAY**

Saturday 14 March 2015  
prepared by Rev Mark Hammond

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
to work, and speak, and think for thee;  
still let me guard the holy fire,  
and still stir up thy gift in me –

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
my acts of faith and love repeat,  
till death thy endless mercies seal,  
and make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

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# 1. AN INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends

On 14 March 2015 a large and varied number of High Street Methodists gathered for our second annual Vision Day. This report captures the conversations we shared and the conclusions we reached as we sought, prayerfully, to discern what God's Spirit is saying to this church.

I am grateful to the cross-section of people who were not only able, but ready and willing to share in this important day. It was wonderful to see the diverse spectrum of our membership was fully represented, and I am glad that my good friends Dennis Stamps of St Nicholas Anglican Parish Church and Trevor Withers of Network Church led our opening devotions, reminding us that High Street is but one small part of the wider Body of Christ.

This document is designed to enable those who were not present on Vision Day to grasp fully what was discussed. It is also intended that this summary of that discussion will help shape the way we progress in the coming year. Beyond this introduction you will find three further sections:

**Section 2** contains the essence of my brief opening address, setting the tone for the day by reminding us that the church is not an end in itself. This section closes by reminding us of our *Vision, Strategy and Mission* statement, which was adopted by our Church Council after Vision Day 2014.

**Section 3** is a report of the progress we have made since March 2014 in taking our strategy forward, and highlights some of the many new initiatives that have been implemented. The section ends with a brief interim-update about the current exploratory arrangements for our Sunday morning worship.

Perhaps most significant of all, **section 4** contains an analysis of the output from the afternoon of Vision Day, when we sought to discern our *values* – or, to put it another way, “the way we seek to do things at High Street”. This exercise was expertly facilitated by Helen Frewin. I believe that the summary six values (which feature on the front cover of this report) will help us to focus in the years to come, not only on what we do, but – more powerfully – how we do it.

I hope you will read this little booklet prayerfully and continue to be inspired to share in all that God is doing in and through us.

May God continue to bless us all as we seek to be His faithful people,

Mark Hammond

## 2. OUR DESTINATION: The church is not the destination

*'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...'*

Matthew 20:28

Before reviewing the progress of this past year at High Street, the following illustration was shared. It reminded us that the church is not an end-in-itself but rather the means to a considerably greater end.

In his book *Remember the Future*, Bishop Robert Schnase of the United Methodist Church in the United States develops this "aeroplane" illustration of the church. It was first used by Dr Joy Moore of Duke Divinity School when she addressed the 2011 World Methodist Conference in South Africa. It goes like this:

The Church is not the destination any more than the plane and a successful flight are the ultimate destination on your next trip. The plane and a successful flight are indeed important, may be essential, to reaching the destination, but they are not the end and purpose. The end is arriving at your home to be with your family, or to successfully complete your business or enjoy your vacation.

The end and purpose of the church is, in the full-blooded Wesleyan sense, "the way to salvation". The end and purpose is growing in grace and in the knowledge and love of God, serving neighbour and seeking justice, pouring our lives out in service to God. It includes partnering God in works of mercy fuelled by works of piety.

And if the destination is not the church, but the way of salvation, then the test of any congregation (its worship, community life and service ministries) is whether it takes people to the destination or not.

This description of the church begs the following questions:

- Does our worship take us to more profound connections with God?
- Does it help us see the world through God's eyes?
- Do our service and justice ministries draw us into the fullness of Christ's compassion for a hurting world? Do they stimulate the call of God in us and provide the channels to make the difference God calls us to make? Do they take us where we need to go in our obedience to Christ, to have in us the mind that was in Christ Jesus?
- Do the community experiences of learning and loving together take each of us personally and all of us collectively to greater compassion, generosity, humility and prayer than we would have ever reached on our own?
- Do the congregation's ministries prod me to deeper exploration of the spiritual life and the heart of God?
- Am I becoming a new creation in Christ and belonging to the body of Christ in this congregation?

- Does our church take our world to a better place that reflects the reign of God and the peace of Christ?

As with congregations, sometimes when flying the way forward involves a tolerance for unexpected turbulence. Travelling on the plane requires me to get along with people I might otherwise not choose to sit alongside. Sometimes I'm assigned a comfortable seat and other times I feel squeezed and inconvenienced, but this is all part of seeking the destination. Without the plane and the flight experience, I would never get there. Without belonging to a congregation and everything that involves (worship, community, service) the destination of growing in the grace of Christ remains a distant desire, a philosophical abstraction.

And – to push the metaphor to breaking point – even if I board the plane and get along with my fellow travellers, we'll just sit on the tarmac unless someone has learned how to fly the plane and has prepared a flight plan. Like planes, some congregations never leave the ground. Others circle the airport, while people enjoy the snacks but never move towards the destination. Some congregations don't take us where we need to go.

And how do seasoned travellers and flight attendants treat first-time flyers who don't know the seating charts, the protocols and the etiquettes of airlines? Are they treated with impatience and rudeness or merely tolerated for their inexperience? Or are they offered good-humoured support, encouragement and welcomed aboard?

We need to be constantly asking the "so that" question. Why do we want stronger congregations? So that... The Methodist Church survives? The numbers look better? We maintain our beautiful buildings? Our ministers have jobs? No! It is not about institutional survival. We fail if we view our congregations, Church Councils, General Church Meetings, our facilities, our ministries or the Church as a whole as ends in themselves. The church is not the destination!

God uses congregations to change the human heart and to reach a hurting world. Congregations are a means of grace, a concrete and personal way God reaches into our world to work His purposes in us and through us. They open us to the way of salvation. They bring us to Christ, and through us, they bring Christ to the world. We work for stronger congregations so that God's plan of salvation becomes accessible, real and visible.

The mission is not ours; it is God's. The invitation is not ours; it is Christ's. It is not about us. It is about God's mission in Christ and how we embody that in the Church. It therefore makes sense for us to work to have as many strong, effective and fruitful congregations as possible. Otherwise, we will never reach the destination!

This sense of purpose-beyond-ourselves is well-expressed in our Vision, Strategy and Mission statement (reprinted on the following page) which was agreed at Vision Day 2014 and was subsequently adopted by our Church Council.

## **Our Adopted Vision, Strategy and Mission Statement**

As part of the Methodist “discipleship movement shaped for mission”

**OUR VISION** is:

**Lives, relationships and communities in this world transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ**

**OUR STRATEGY** for sharing in this work of God is to:

**Encounter God;  
Equip God’s people;  
Extend God’s Kingdom.**

**To this end,**  
alongside our fellow Christians  
Christ calls us to know Him and to make Him known.

**Therefore,**  
when gathered together corporately  
or dispersed as individuals,  
we at all times and in all places  
by the grace of God  
seek to be the salt and light of the world:  
Filled with the Spirit of God;  
Following the Son of God;  
All for the glory of God.

**Corporately**  
we believe God has called us  
to be a welcoming, outward-reaching and diverse all-age community  
living and growing for the glory of God  
by making, nurturing, equipping and sending  
disciples of Jesus Christ  
who are continually being  
filled, transformed, led and empowered by God’s Spirit  
to actively share in God’s mission of love to the world  
as ambassadors of Christ.

**Individually**  
we believe God calls us each to seek God’s grace:  
to grow in our love for God and for our neighbour;  
to grow in the likeness of Christ our Saviour;  
to be diligent in helping those who are in any need;  
to be disciplined in personal prayer, Bible study and worship; and  
through the joyful offering of ourselves, our time and our money  
to play our full part as members of Christ’s body: The Church.

### 3. STRATEGY IN ACTION: What progress have we made?

*'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'*  
Acts 2.47

During this past year we have started a process of ensuring our resources are being deployed to better achieve our threefold strategy of *encountering God, equipping God's People* and *extending God's kingdom*. On the morning of Vision Day 2015 we reviewed our year through this strategic lens.

#### a. Testimonies of recent personal experience

We started our review of the year with the personal experience of those who had gathered together for Vision Day.

In small groups we listed the ways at High Street Methodist Church we had this year encountered God, been equipped as God's people and witnessed the extension of God's kingdom. **The full list we generated is given in Appendix 1**, and can be summarised as follows:

We have encountered God through:

- Various styles and aspects of worship
- New prayer initiatives
- Taking time to hear the faith-story of others
- Bible study, teaching and preaching.

We have been equipped as God's people through:

- Worship and Junior Church
- Teaching
- Homegroups
- Prayer Days
- Serving on a team.

We have witnessed the extension of God's kingdom through:

- Our new prayer and witness initiatives
- Our growing work among young people
- Newcomers who have joined us
- Getting to know new friends
- Homegroups
- Our new men's ministry
- Worship
- The charities we support.

## **b. Our starting point: God's grace amidst human frailty**

One of the scriptures that seems to reflect where we find ourselves is Isaiah 43.18-19, where God says to his people:

*'Do not remember the former things,  
Nor consider the things of old.  
See, I am doing a new thing,  
Now it springs up!  
Do you not perceive it?'*

Twelve months ago many of us felt we were beginning to see green shoots of new growth. Since then this sense that God is indeed doing a new thing at High Street Methodist Church has increased. Many of us perceive that God's Spirit is renewing and reshaping us to be an ever-more-effective means of sharing God's grace. And God appears to be growing our desire to encounter Him, be equipped as His people and sharing in extending His kingdom. In short, there is a growing expectation that we are increasingly going to witness lives, relationships and communities being transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ.

This growing awareness of God's grace at work among us is accompanied by a sober and realistic judgement of our own human and institutional weakness. As the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4.7:

*'But we have this treasure in jars of clay  
to show that this all-surpassing power  
is from God and not from us.'*

Our particular clay jar remains almost as frail as it was a year ago. As we concluded then, on the surface High Street Methodist Church appears to be a large, strong and well-resourced community of faith. The underlying reality is somewhat weaker than that. We are blessed at High Street to have some very gifted, energetic and resourceful people. We rejoice that God continues to draw talented newcomers to share in our worship, work and witness. But this wonderful recent growth is set against the backdrop of more than three decades of decline, during which the committed core of our membership has become smaller and older. It is true that compared to many other churches we are still relatively large. It is also true that every generation is represented among us. Even so, the fact is that we have for some time, been in decline and are now considerably smaller, and on-the-whole, much older than we once were. So, whilst it is right to celebrate the new thing God is doing among us, our need of God's ongoing grace is as great now as it ever has been.

We were briefly reminded that the extent of our historic decline is seen very clearly in our official membership and attendance figures for the years 1983-2013.

In 1983 the church comprised 702 members. It then steadily fell by an average rate of 10 members a year, or 100 members a decade. The figure recorded in October 2013 was 402, representing a 42 per cent decline in just 30 years.

Perhaps a more accurate indication of our numeric strength is gained by looking at the number of people who worship with us each Sunday. Records show that in October 1983 an average of 433 adults attended worship. Twenty years later, this had more than halved to just 203.

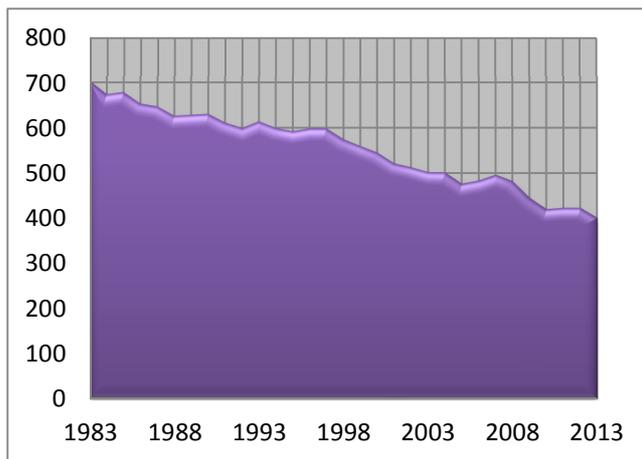


Figure 1 - HSMC Total Membership 1983-2013

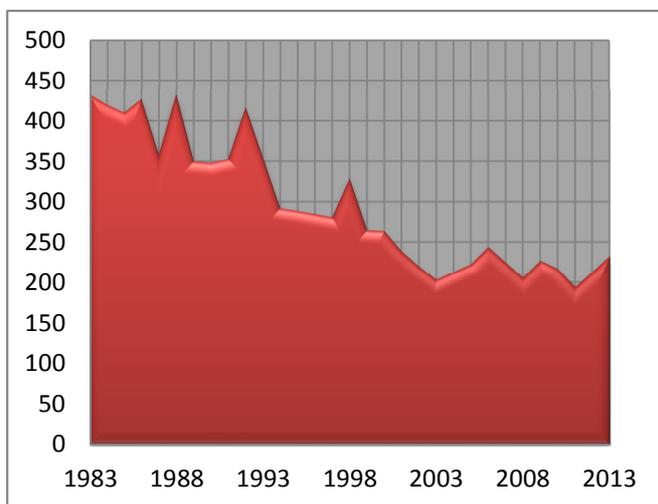


Figure 2 - HSMC Adult Attendance at Worship 1983-2013

More positively, however, in the decade to 2013 our weekly attendance fluctuated just above 200 adults. In 2013 we recorded 233 worshippers, which was the highest adult attendance for seven years.

Given that the national statistics for the entire British Methodist Church have continued to show a consistent and steady decline in attendance at worship, the 2003-2013 figures for High Street suggest that we have been somehow “bucking the trend”. It may well be that the introduction, in 2006, of our separate, informal service was a significant factor in halting this decline.

Without doubt, the attendance figures that most concerned us last year were those relating to the children among us. Where in October 1984, there were an average of 247 children in our Junior Church, by 2013 there were only 44.

The overwhelming majority of those who gathered for our Vision Day 2014 expressed a strong desire to see these declines in membership and attendance reversed. The clear message was: We want to grow! We want to see more members of all ages and more worshippers of all ages.

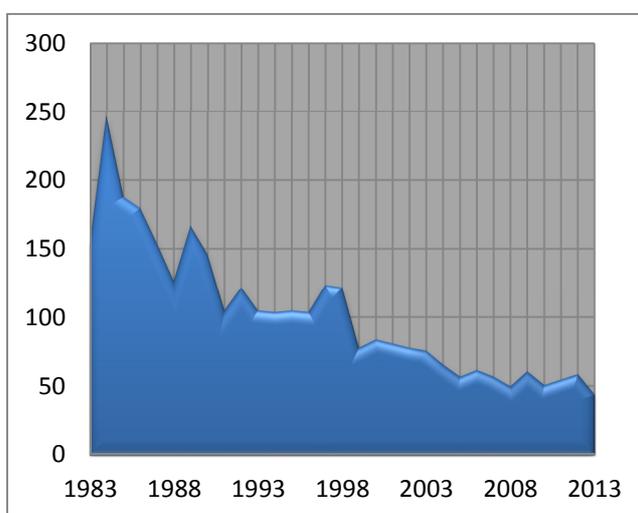


Figure 3 - Average Child Attendance on Sundays 1983-2013

Some of the other facts and figures that we reviewed at last year's Vision Day confirmed that the gender-mix and age-distribution of our congregations were some way off reflecting those of the general population of Harpenden.

Regarding gender-mix, our 2014 congregational survey revealed that, where the general population is 51% female and 49% male, our adult worshippers are 65% female and only 35% male.

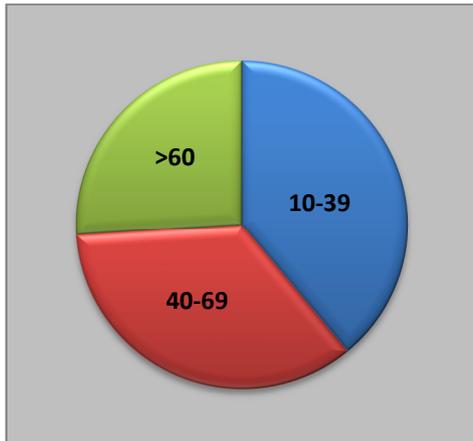


Figure 3 - Age Profile of Harpenden  
(2011 National Census)

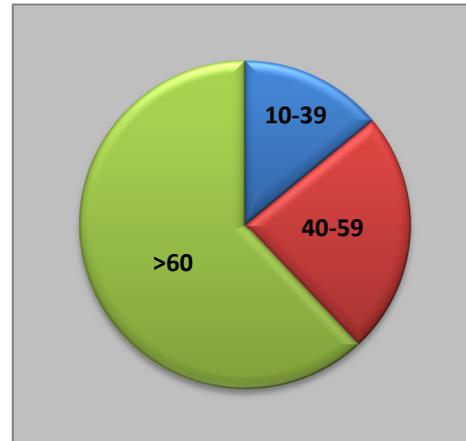


Figure 4 - Age Profile of High Street  
(2014 High Street Census)

The same congregational census showed that the age profile of our worshippers was significantly skewed towards the older end of the spectrum. Outside our doors only a quarter of the population was aged over sixty, whereas inside our doors we were almost two-thirds over sixty. Where those aged between 10 to 39 accounted for 39 per cent of the Harpenden population, they were only 14 per cent of us.

The strong conclusions we reached at last year's Vision Day were subsequently adopted by our Church Council as a policy statement. Namely:

***We would like more:***

- ***Members of all ages***
- ***Worshippers of all ages***

***and proportionally more:***

- ***Children and teenagers***
- ***Men***
- ***Young adults*** (by which we meant under 60s!).

For such a policy to be delivered inevitably requires some changes. It has been well said that any given organisation is perfectly designed to deliver the results it is getting, so we are unlikely to get better results simply by endeavouring to try harder to do everything the way we have always done it. For whatever reason, in common with institutional churches throughout the western world, the way of doing church that we have inherited has for some time now resulted in church decline. Indeed, there are many among us who have only ever known decline. Some find change difficult because we tend to get rather attached to the way things have been. Indeed, many of us are products of the way things have been, and a number of us have

invested rather heavily in the way things have been. Nevertheless, as we look at traditional churches up and down this land, it seems that approaches that were well-suited to bring church growth for earlier generations appear to do so no-longer. This does not mean we should rush blindly ahead changing everything. It does mean that we should be continually open to doing things in new ways; open to Spirit-led change.

In considering what changes we might adopt and what new initiatives we might implement, it is vital to remember that the church itself is not the destination. Our aim is not to focus on growing the church but on fulfilling our Vision and Strategy (detailed on page 6). For sure, church growth will be a natural by-product of doing this because to be part of a church that is fully committed to encountering God, equipping God's people and partnering in extending God's kingdom is a phenomenally attractive thing! And it is hard to imagine anything more fulfilling than being a witness to lives, relationships and communities being transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ!

### c. Our activities: A catalogue of new initiatives

Our Vision and Strategy has inspired the members of High Street to implement around thirty or so new initiatives in the past twelve months, and some of the army of people who have been involved in them spoke enthusiastically about what they have been doing.

We heard how the following initiatives are now providing new ways for people to ***Encounter God***:

- New quarterly 24 hours of prayer
- New monthly 8 o'clock Service
- New monthly Tuesday night Prayer Hour
- Annexe Youth Prayer Room created
- Exploring expanded capacity for all Sunday morning worshippers
- New weekly pre-service prayer meetings
- New Junior Church format for 5-11s
- Lent Prayer Stations and Events
- New Junior Choir

We heard how the following initiatives are now providing new ways for people to be ***Equipped as God's People***:

Two Alpha Courses

Four new homegroups

New stock in the Resources Centre

Worship Leader Training

New voluntary youth worker development programme

New monthly School of Theology

Growth of teams for Sunday rotas

Sunday sermons online

Prayer ministry training scheduled

We heard how the following initiatives are now providing new ways for people to share in ***Extending God's Kingdom***:

Increased work in the local schools

Providing a home for The 267 Project

Extended Communion for the housebound

Harpenden Christmas Carnival including *The Journey*

Many charity initiatives inc. Water Carry and SHARE

Hosting Riding Lights and Roughshod

Ecumenical X-ite children's event

Mentalk And Women's Create

Extended Friday Night Club @ The Annexe

This catalogue of new initiatives is evidence that our Vision and Strategy are catching the imagination, releasing creative energy and resulting in many more people being involved in and touched by our core activities.

And as in this way we have been focusing upon fulfilling God’s calling for us at High Street:

**d. God has been adding to our number**

Whilst these are early days, the annual “October Count” for 2014 suggests that we are starting to see some growth.

<b>OFFICIAL MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE FIGURES</b>			
	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>+/_</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>+24</b>
<b>Sunday Worship:</b>			
- <b>adults</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>+22</b>
- <b>0-5s</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>+8</b>
- <b>5-13s</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>+3</b>
- <b>13-19s</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>+17</b> *

\* This large increase is mainly down to our hosting an ecumenical youth service (FUEL) in October 2014

Such increases are wonderful news and indicate our Vision and Strategy are moving us in the right direction. More importantly, it also means that we are growing in our capacity to bear fruit for God. In human and organisational terms we may remain relatively weak, but God is clearly blessing us as we seek to encounter Him, to be equipped to serve Him and to join Him in the great mission of extending His kingdom.

**e. Update on the Sunday Morning Exploratory Period**

Among our many new initiatives this past year, we have continued to explore together how best to expand our capacity to grow our two main Sunday morning congregations and our Junior Church. So, within the context of our Vision and

Strategy, members of the Worship Team, who are acting as the exploratory period steering group, presented the following update:

### ***The exploratory period thus far...***

*Last October the Church Council gave the go-ahead for an eight month period of exploration, embracing the concept of sequential services. Council had before it an outline of the proposed exploratory period.*

*So on 4 January 2015 we began the exploration with the Informal services starting at 9.30 am and the Traditional services at 11.15 am. The 8.00 am monthly Holy Communion moved to 7.45 am*

*We in the Worship Team were asked to act as a steering group. We knew that the exploration would make considerable demands on many elements of the Church community. At least 22 different groups were identified as having to play some part in getting the exploration underway. The minor miracle is that the exploration got underway and is still going on. That is very much due to the valiant groundwork those groups have and are still engaged in.*

*We also knew that exploration meant handling some tricky issues. Some issues continue to require monitoring and adjustments where possible. We also wanted to hear where the changes evoked a positive and fresh approach to worship. Both positive and negative issues are at the centre of the responses received thus far to the exploratory period.*

### ***The mid-way changeover...***

*When we met for Vision Day 2015 there were just three more Sundays to go with the first stage of the exploratory period. After Easter Day we would be moving to the Traditional service being at 9.30 am and the Informal at 11.15 am. The monthly early morning Holy Communion continuing at 7.45 am. This pattern will continue until end July, with special arrangements to be planned for August.*

*Some idea of the kind of feedback we have received to date is given later in this brief report, but it is important that we all continue to engage with the exploration and provide genuinely-felt feedback. So please keep using the yellow feedback forms, and please chat with the "yellow-badge brigade" (they are not parking attendants!!) but members of the Worship Team.*

### ***Coming to a decision...***

*The Church Council meets on 8 July, when the Worship Team will need to present a report on the exploratory period and to make a reasoned recommendation(s). Before then, in addition to the opportunities for comments already mentioned, our Presbyteral Minister (Mark) will write to every Church Member and to others who worship regularly with us on a Sunday morning. That letter will invite everyone to have their final word, if they wish, about the changes experienced in the exploratory period.*

*Given the experience of all those opportunities for full and frank expression of views the Worship Team will have to consider the nature of its report to the Church Council.*

*In late June the Worship Team's report is likely to contain:*

- *A reasoned recommendation to adopt a particular pattern of Sunday morning worship*
- *A summary of issues that will need to be addressed in implementing that recommendation*
- *The further exploration of those issues*
- *Any financial considerations that may need to be addressed.*

*As the Circuit Plan for September to November has to be ready by late-July, the decision of the July Church Council will be essential in deciding how this Church's worship plans dovetail with those of the Circuit. The pattern of worship in July will continue the second phase arrangements of the exploratory period. As in previous years, the plan for August will differ – it being a holiday month.*

### **Feedback thus far...**

In preparation for Vision Day a number of “graffiti boards” were created, each summarising a different topic upon which the Worship Team had already received feedback. The main headings covered issues around:

- Worship styles
- Junior Church and youth
- Welcoming
- Timing
- Fixtures, fittings and space
- Fellowship, coffee, Wesleys
- Other.

Of these, it was reported that the specific areas that are giving rise to the expression of strongest concern are:

1. Splitting people who are used to being together – especially family and friends
2. Early start time – helpers, teenagers, oversleepers
3. Late finish – young children, domestic arrangements
4. Coffee between the services
5. The changeover between services – muddle in lobby, newcomers, mobility.

Over lunchtime everyone present on Vision Day was encouraged to read the issues on the “exploratory period” graffiti boards and, where issues were raised that required a solution, to add ideas. In addition they were asked to add any other issues they believed needed to be addressed.

To ensure the widest possible input, the graffiti boards remained in place for the following day's worship services, and members of those congregations were also invited to read and contribute.

**All the comments received in this way are recorded in Appendix 2.**

#### 4. OUR VALUES: Discerning the values that will shape us

We began the afternoon session of Vision Day considering how as a church our actions and our way of being are shaped by the values we share. Like the visible tip of an iceberg, which is held aloft by something rather more substantial which is hidden beneath the surface, so what we do and how we are is dictated by our collective values. The famous passage about love in 1 Corinthians 13 suggests that even the best actions are worthless unless fuelled by the right motives:

*'If I speak in tongues of humans and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.'*

1 Corinthians 13.1-3

The thirty or more new initiatives we implemented this past year prove that we are very good at generating actions. The purpose of this afternoon session was to take some time to discern together what values should be shaping “the way we do things” at High Street Methodist Church.

This process of discernment was led by Helen Frewin, who – using the Bible as a starting point - led us through the small-group exercises that are set out in Appendix 3. The detailed output from the afternoon, also listed in Appendix 3, divides under the following six headings, which are set below with a brief commentary and some of the relevant Bible references.

##### 1. CHRIST-CENTRED DISCIPLESHIP

– God-reliant, Spirit-filled, disciplined in prayer and Bible reading

- John 15.4 - *'Remain in me, and I will remain in you.'*
- John 3.16 - *'...whoever believes in me may have eternal life.'*
- Psalm 121.2 - *'My help comes from the LORD...'*
- Psalm 23.1 - *'The LORD is my Shepherd...'*
- Ephesians 3.18 - *'...grasp how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Christ.'*
- Galatians 5.16-22 - *'...live by the Spirit...'*
- Matthew 26.36 – Spend time with Father God.

That Christ-centredness is a key value is hardly surprising. We exist to know Christ and to make Christ known. If we branches of the True Vine are to bear abundant fruit for God then we must abide in Jesus Christ (John 15.4). In this regard people spoke on Vision Day of our being faithful, disciplined, purposeful and obedient. Private and corporate prayer and Bible study are not optional extras for those who seek to be Christ-centred disciples. If we sheep are truly serious about listening for the voice of our Good Shepherd, then we must make time to do so. Without Christ we can do nothing for Christ, and our commitment to living for Him should be evident in our devotional life.

## 2. OTHER-CENTRED CARE

– Love-fuelled, person-to-person, attentive

- 1 Corinthians 13.4-6 - *'Love is patient, love is kind... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.'*
- 1 Thessalonians 5.15 - *'...always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.'*

Other-centredness is a value that flows directly from being Christ-centred. If we want Christ on the throne then we must vacate it. Self-sacrifice must take the place of self-centredness. Those who have freely received from the love of God are commissioned to freely give of that love to others. Jesus commands his followers to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13.34), on Vision Day people spoke of our need to be considerate, empathetic and attentive to others; giving them our personal time, lending them a patient listening ear.

## 3. NON-JUDGEMENTAL WELCOME

– Open, hospitable, genuine

- Matthew 7.1-6 - *'Do not judge, or you too will be judged...'*

Non-judgementalism is such a key value for us. As a church made up of recovering sinners who all rely upon God's grace, we are in no position to judge anyone-else who comes amongst us. Furthermore, as our community is centred on Christ, the welcome we give to visitors is not our own welcome, it is the welcome of Christ Himself. We signify this fact in our Methodist tradition by having an “open table” whenever we share bread and wine together; Christ invites to *His table* all who seek to love Him – no exceptions. The writer to the Hebrews says “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13.2). So, regardless of how strange they may be, we will always seek to welcome with kindness and without judgement the strangers who come our way.

## 4. ALL-EMBRACING UNITY

– Unconditional-love, mutual-concern, non-partisan

- James 4.11 - *'Sisters and brothers, do not slander one another.'*

Being all-embracing is a critical value as we seek to be a diverse church. We want to embrace and accommodate the differences that exist within our membership. We do not want our differences to become the cause of division. In his letter to the Galatians the Apostle Paul warned against the “sinful acts” of ‘rivalries’, ‘divisions’ and ‘factions’ (Galatians 5.20), and on Vision Day people spoke of the need for mutual-respect, tolerance and encouragement.

## 5. **OUTWARD-FOCUSED SERVICE**

– Humble, generous, self-sacrificial

- John 3.16 - *'For God so loved the world...'*
- Luke 10.25-37 - The Good Samaritan: *'Go and do likewise.'*
- Matthew 25.31-46 - *'...whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.'*

Being outward-focused is a key value for us because the focus of God's love is not the church but the world (John 3.16). We do not exist for ourselves. The church is not the destination. What we seek is 'lives, relationships, and communities *in this world* transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ.' To this end, on Vision Day we spoke of our service in the world having a particular quality to it. The way we serve should not be domineering and controlling, but instead marked by humility, generosity and self-sacrifice. The way we are called to serve is not only outward-focused but is also clearly Christ-centred. The model we follow is our humble foot-washing Lord (John 13.1-17) who came "not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10.45).

## 6. **AUTHENTIC WITNESS**

– Honest, real, confident

- Isaiah 6.8 - *'Here I am send me.'*
- Acts 1.8 - *'...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.'*

Our final key value is authenticity; being real, honest and genuine. Nowhere is this value more important than in the way we share our faith with others. The most compelling witness is the one who does not cover up the difficulties they face in their walk with Christ, but rather tells it as it is. King David is referred to as 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Samuel 13.14, Acts 13.22), and yet many of the Psalms of David are expressions of great turmoil and difficulty. God wants us to be real about our faith; real with Him, real with each-other and real with others.

These six headings provide a short-hand summary of the values we discerned to be at the heart of the way God wants us to be. Each heading consists of a "practice" in light-type (*discipleship, care, welcome, unity, service, witness*) which is qualified by an adjective in bold-type (*Christ-centred, other-centred, non-judgemental, all-embracing, outward-focused, authentic*). The six adjectives can be used interchangeably to qualify any of the six practices and they would equally well reflect the underlying sense of the values that were uncovered on Vision Day. It is hoped that these values will now continue to shape how we do the things we do at High Street Methodist Church, and will better enable us to keep on developing as the community of Christ's people we are called to be.

## Appendix 1 – Our encountering, equipping and extending

The General Church Meeting divided into a number of small groups for this first exercise. The comments in all three Appendices are verbatim.

**Exercise 1:** *In the last 12 months, how have you:*

- *Been enabled to encounter God*
- *Been equipped as a person of God*
- *Witnessed the extension of God's kingdom?*

### How have you encountered God?

#### *In worship...*

- Prior day's worship training
  - The 8 PM service is great!
  - Choir
  - Contemporary service
  - 6:30 services, prayer meetings
- More clarity for structure service.

#### *In prayer initiatives...*

- Prayer Meetings
- 24 hours of prayer.

#### *Through other people...*

- Testimonies
- Being a member of the Home Group, meeting newcomers
- Getting close to other people
- Multi-generational conversations, building relationships
- Gradual strengthening of the spirit and sense of oneness
- Mentoring
- Yenner.

#### *Through the Bible, preaching and teaching...*

- Listening to the word of God being preached.

- Ramping up of quality of preaching on Sundays
- Better personal devotion of life to Bible study
- School of Theology.

## **How have you been equipped as God's person?**

### ***In worship and Junior Church...***

- Sunday Services
- Increased sense of community coming from change to Sunday service pattern
- Youth participating in services
- Junior Church.

### ***By receiving teaching...***

- Bible teaching
- School of Theology
- Personal reading and courses
- Alpha
- Training program for youth volunteers
- Resources Centre.

### ***Through attending a Home Group...***

- Home Groups
- Inspiration coming from home groups.

### ***By attending Prayer Days...***

- Prayer days.

### ***By serving on a team...***

- Being involved in a team.

## **How have you witnessed the extension of God's kingdom?**

### ***In prayer and witness...***

- 24 hour prayer
- Change in use of the church – more Christian focus
- New members as a result of 24 hour prayer.

### ***Amongst our young people...***

- Sunday School and Junior Church
- Thursday night youth
- Friday night more young people and are more open
- More children in Sunday school
- Young moms inquiring to bring children to children's church
- Children asking questions
- Godly play - Faith through storytelling training shared with teachers of junior church
- Children have changed their attitude - want to come
- 60 - 100 young people on Friday.

### ***In newcomers joining us...***

- New people coming and being welcomed
- God avails himself to us to have encounters with other disciples
- Welcoming new members.

### ***In befriending others...***

- Making friends with existing members we haven't spoken to before
- Meeting people.

### ***In homegroups...***

- Bible study in house groups.

***In our new men's ministry...***

- Men's group and other fellowship groups like Mentalk.

***In aspects of our worship...***

- Diversity of visiting preachers / local ministers is a benefit
- Holy Spirit is in church services
- More young families in the traditional service.

***Through our charities...***

- Supporting charity events
- Food bank.

## Appendix 2 – Exploratory period feedback

In preparation for Vision Day a number of “graffiti boards” were created, each summarizing a different topic upon which the Worship Team had received feedback.

**Exercise 2:** *Please read the issues on the “exploratory period” graffiti boards and, where issues are raised that require a solution, please add your ideas. And please add any other issues you believe need to be addressed.*

The graffiti boards were left up during the following day’s worship and many more comments were added by those who were not present on Vision Day.

The following lists all the comments posted on the various graffiti boards on Vision Day and the following Sunday.

### 1. Worship Styles

#### a. General comments:

- *We should build our lives around worship, rather than build worship around our lives – Seek first his Kingdom*
- *Loving the 8 pm contemporary service*
- *8 pm service is awesome*
- *8 pm service too late but does fall nicely after dinner. Possibly replace one 6.30 pm service a month?*
- *Love the new style worship group once a month, maybe more often?*
- *Best part of the trial period is that the service I attend now feels like the ‘main service’*
- *We must, must, must drop the term informal worship. It gives people the wrong impression. It is contemporary worship*
- *[Added to above] – it is not! 8 pm is contemporary*
- *Very much enjoyed the opportunity to visit traditional service since it was at a different time*
- *Re feeling like 2 congregations – There are probably 5 or 6 congregations, take your pick, all tastes catered for!*

- *Accoustics at the second service come across better than the first – not so loud.*

### **Teenagers not getting up for 9.30/Elderly preferring particular time?**

- *[re teenagers] Think this is very sad comment – why would they not? You could argue there are many older people who may not be able to get to 9.30. Much better both services back at 10.30*
- *Has this comment come from a young person? I have spoken to many who prefer the 9.30 get up. (another has added they agree with this)*
- *There are people of every age at both services so do we start both at 11.15 am(added comment –very much agree with this).*

### **b. Worship Together:**

- *Worship Together every month, we miss it please bring it back (with four others agreeing)*
- *Not missing the Worship Together and I have children (another agrees)*
- *All together service must include organ, band, choir and New Creation (added comment: that is a lot in one service).*

### **c. Preference for 10.30 parallel services:**

- *Eight people signed their agreement with this*
- *Could have joint 10.30 am which change weekly between styles. This would allow us to enjoy the church community, avoid timing issues and appreciate both styles of worship*
- *The sequential services mean we can build capacity and grow. Lots of people in Harpenden don't know Jesus. They will have varied tastes in worship when they come to faith and this style means lots of room for everyone.*

## **2. Junior Church/Youth**

### **a. General comments**

- *I think we should avoid stereotypes based on age*
- *My grandchildren love the new service arrangements, allowing them to use the hall*
- *Could we not design an area for JC. The hall is very large for their needs*

- *Would be devastating to go back now. The children get so much more being in the hall*
- *The purpose of youth options is because it better meets them where they are. Perhaps synchronising JC with main service message?*

#### **b. Crèche area in church**

- *Not having a crèche area in church isolated and alienated already lonely and marginalised people. Is this right?*
- *One of the big reasons I started coming to High Street was I felt welcomed with my young children and included in the service and as part of the church family. This is now missing*
- *They are most likely worshipping or building friendships with other kids by playing games. To stop the noise would be to suggest we worship God quieter. It's not noise.*

#### **c. Little fishes**

- *Little Fishes age range is too big*
- *How about making Little Fishes two groups but with flexibility to join together if numbers allow i.e. keep them next door Creche 0-2, Little Fishes 3-4, with flexibility if two year olds are ready.*

### **3. Welcoming**

- *We're all called to welcome one another not wait to be welcomed*
- *More welcomers not just stewards. I would love to welcome people as part of the welcoming team (their name has been sent to Di Holding)*
- *Need welcomers from both services*
- *Newcomers Team: we find two services works well with a good 'buzz' between services and a lively atmosphere to welcome newcomers. Confusion: some see us as general welcomers, which we are not.*
- *I'm blessed to belong to such a vibrant, forward thinking community*
- *People say they choose to come to HS because we are such a welcoming church*
- *Exit through door to the right of the main entrance ( disabled access door?) between services*

## 4. Unity

- *Having two services allows us to grow*
- *Lots of time to share time together throughout the week*
- *I feel sad that people have begun to talk of two congregations. We may worship in different styles but we are one Church*
- *Variety is the spice of life. What unites us is far greater than what divides us*
- *Think outside the box: sequential services with one being parallel to the traditional service – would answer a lot of issues on these sheets*
- *Everyone is being given the opportunity to give their opinion. Thank you*
- *Great that there is room for the informal service to grow – there was standing room only in the hall before*
- *I feel there are two audiences present at HSMC and we must go with the flow and cater for both without compromise*
- *The key issue is what do people need who do not worship here yet? The purpose of us being here is mission to those who do not know Jesus yet. We then fit around the requirements of mission.*

## 5. Timing Issues

- *When people leave the 9.30 service they may be encouraged to leave by one of the side doors that lead to the car park*
- *Timings may need to be altered – later service finishes rather too late for some.*
- *[another added their agreement to this comment]*
- *9.15 and 11.00 in future? Keeping to the time of the first service is very important*
- *Play with the time of the services, 9 – 10, 10.45 – 11.45 [agree]*
- *Back at Thornton Methodist Church they have, on Sunday morning a service at 9.30 and a service at 11am.*
- *Great idea to have two services with various styles. Gives options to attend at different times if you need to. Times seem good to me.*
- *Let's be flexible. We are fortunate to have this problem.*

- *The preacher needs to be very aware of timing in sequential services.....not sure if that is good or not*
- *9.30 is a bit early for teenagers*
- *Whatever time the two services lunch will always feel rushed – need to prepare in advance, or eat out or eat later*
- *Lots of new families are coming because of the 9.30 service*
- *Older people tend to rise early – so the 9.30 may be more appropriate start for traditional service. Let the teenagers stay in bed!*
- *How about 9.15/11. Finish by 12*
- *We have provision for both services but YP have mainly attended 9.30*
- *Ensure services do not overrun*
- *Provide food/snacks for families in Wesleys so they can give children a bite*
- *Can you have breakfast later on Sunday or have an extra piece of toast.....*
- *Focus on worshipping for the one hour required in the service. Arrange family/friend time any other time of the week or after the service*
- *Why not come to both services?*
- *Because a person meets with God at one style more than the other.*

## **6. Fixtures. Fittings and Space**

- *It's great to be using the church more, chairs and tables etc for meetings*
- *Extra lighting could be installed [re lighting at the front being inadequate]*
- *As part of the hall congregation it is wonderful to be back worshipping in a space specifically created for worship. No Problem! Maybe discard some of the pews – uncomfortable.*
- *Change takes time. You are doing a great job. Well done*
- *We are here to worship God not feel cosy [re missing cosiness of the hall]*
- *A custom, purpose-designed sound system can be installed to relieve [speakers hiding hymn numbers] problems*
- *Making church conducive for informal worship also needs to be acceptable for traditional worship*

- *We must be aware of the second service and chat quietly in Wesleys*
- *Really like the church pews and they add to the traditional worship atmosphere*
- *You limit church growth if there are only pews. Chairs change the atmosphere and make the church more welcoming. The main church can then be used for bigger events/activities as you can move the chairs*
- *Pews are part of the listed building status*
- *If transepts are unappealing, sit in the nave*
- *Roped off pews put off people coming in late or new people*
- *Difficult access and seating for pushchairs and young children. Makes it hard to feel welcome and thought about. Not all inclusive for young families*
- *The pews are very uncomfortable.*

## **7. Fellowship/Coffee/Wesleys**

- *The concept of coffee between services is not working well. Seeing friends and spending time with them is very important*
- *Is this the reason for coming?*
- *Increasing numbers of people sharing coffee from both services*
- *Extend refreshments into the back of the church to help ease squashed feeling*
- *Great to have lots of different people serving coffee in Wesleys*
- *Wesleys gets very full over coffee – overspill into the church until 11*
- *Coffee and tea before and after later service*
- *Coffee is to wake you up so should be served before. It should also be served afterwards for a social aspect*
- *Could we use the hall for coffee due to the kitchen and big space*
- *Prefer coffee time as you can get to speak to people – it was too packed before so prefer less people coming but that's not so good for building fellowship*

- *Tolerance and Awareness*
- *Increasing number of folks from both services enjoying coffee*
- *Variety is the spice of life! What unites us is far greater than what divides us*
- *Why be bothered about that [noise travelling from Wesley's] we are a mixed community and should be tolerant*
- *Trying to worship [re above comment]*
- *Back at Thornton Methodist Church they have coffee served between services and I'm used to this pattern.*

## Appendix 3 – Discerning the values that will shape us

During the afternoon of Vision Day, Helen Frewin led the small groups through the following exercises:

**Exercise 3a:** *Alongside 1 Corinthians 13, what other Bible passages indicate values and principles that should shape the way we are as a church?*

**Exercise 3b:** *Having considered the Bible passages, what do you now think could be the values or the words/phrases that describe how we need to be at High Street in order to Encounter, Equip & Extend? (List as many words and phrases as you can on your tables).*

**Exercise 3c:** *Prioritise all those words and phrases down to a list of six key themes.*

**Exercise 3d:** *Against your list of six key themes, what example situations and behaviours can you write for each one – to show how that value might come to life?  
(For example, if you came up with a theme of “welcoming” – you might say “greeting people with a smile as they come into the building” and “making sure there is space for new people to join us at Sunday services.”)*

**Exercise 3e:** *Using your list of six key themes, how could you now look at the Sunday Services challenges?*

*How could we think about these challenges differently if we were true to your six words/phrases?*

*What new solutions could you come up with that fit with your six words/phrases?*

**Exercise 3f:** *And what about organising new and existing activity to Encounter, Equip and Extend?*

*Using your list of six key themes, how would you recommend we make decisions about what to do next and how to do it?*

*It might be better for us to do a few things well rather than start a lot of new things, and deliver them not so well. How would you recommend we make those decisions about where to focus our activity?*

What follows is a compilation of all the words, statements and ideas that were generated in the small groups (except for the few that proved difficult to decipher!). These have been arranged under six general headings which appear to summarise what was being said.

# 1. CHRIST-CENTRED DISCIPLESHIP

## – God-reliant, Spirit-filled, disciplined in prayer and Bible reading

- Abide in Jesus and bear much fruit *John 15 verse 4*
- *John 3 verse 16*
- *Psalms 121* my help cometh from the Lord
- *Psalms 23* the Lord is my Shepherd
- *Ephesians 3 verse 18* how broad and long and high and deep
- *Matthew 25. 1-31* Being like Jesus
- *Galatians 5. 1- 22.* The spirit produces love joy peace patience kindness
- Spend time with the Father *Matthew 26 verse 36*
- Having Jesus in the centre of our lives
- Be still
- Worship centred on Jesus
- Faithfulness
- Seeking the discipline to encounter God daily, corporately and individually through scripture study and service
- Joy. Jesus, others and yourself. Through studying scripture supporting and encouraging others
- Joy and discipleship
- Through prayer, spending time with God and others, Bible meditation knowing Jesus is better
- Take part in life of the church
- Do your job well
- Pray without ceasing
- Purposeful
- Faithful
- Disciplined
- Knowing what's going on in the church
- Discipleship is our responsibility - our ability to respond is a responsibility.
- Important that we discipline ourselves to spend time with Jesus everyday through prayer and Bible reading
- Jesus first, yourselves last, and others in-between
- Daily seeking and obeying God
- If you're not receiving from God you're not pouring out. Encounter God requires discipline in your life. We are free to do it, it is not a requirement.
- Discipline in scripture study and encountering God
- Hope because of resurrection
- Spirit-filled and led by constant communication with God.

## 2. OTHER-CENTRED CARE

### – Love-fuelled, person-to-person, attentive

- *1 Corinthians 13*
- *1 Corinthians 13*
- Offering to pray with someone *1 Thessalonians 5 verse 17*
- Imagine presence of Holy Spirit - remember everyone is a precious child of God
- Reaching out in possibly uncomfortable situations, seeking to walk alongside people. But what differentiates is from the secular support world ie social services?
- We need to be less busy and more available. Accessible to minister into the community's needs
- We need to make time and take time for everyone. By really concentrating on somebody, no distractions, listening with care and attention
- Visiting and supporting of others with prayer e.g. elderly sick depressed bereaved lonely and everyone else
- Listening
- Eye contact
- Being prepared to miss the bus and catch the next one?
- Empathy
- Non judgmental listening
- Taking time
- Loving kindness
- Following through
- Gentle and accepting love
- Listening to Vernon: "How are you really?"
- Less busy - being available, accessible
- Selfless - no agenda, stopping and listening, take time and make time for people at church
- Considerate
- Understanding
- Forgiving
- Listening
- Loving
- Caring
- Empathy
- Recognising people's needs and understanding.
- Nurturing is the first step of along the journey
- Empathy, listening, allowing passivity
- Thankful
- Listening where they are
- We are different to social services because we pray for people, direct them towards Jesus, and communicate that they matter to God

- Concentrate on listening, follow up on body language, willingness to help with church
- Genuine interest means you remember my name, who I am, or something about me
- Parking sensibly - leave space in the back car park for the less mobile

### **3. NON-JUDGEMENTAL WELCOME**

#### **– Open, hospitable, genuine**

- Don't judge people *Matthew 7 verse 1 - 6*
- Non-judgmental of appearances *Matthew 5 verse 6*
- Welcoming is remembering. A conscious and genuine effort to develop relationships
- Reading body language, discerning, meeting people and acting. Communicating properly using eye contact and listening with care and attention
- Open and inviting
- Welcoming - remembering names and ask open questions
- Hospitable
- Welcoming
- Inviting people to Home Groups or something
- An Oasis of calm. Take a load off your feet; maybe a receptionist
- Open - don't assume people know things
- Making contact, maintaining contact, handing information to new worshiper
- Making sure the next step happens
- Do not assume people know what to do or what individuals want from worship
- Talking the right language - cheerful down to earth - attentive
- Honouring one another and letting others enter or leave the church before you, especially those with physical challenges
- Welcoming to everyone. Not preferential because of background race or wealth
- Genuine
- Welcoming
- Kindness and welcome
- Hospitality looking out for the new
- Sitting with new people. Chatting to new people. Accepting you might be nervous to meet people
- Look out for and show facial animation when you see the person
- Introducing people to other people
- Information point with what's on and who is doing it
- Photo address book
- Newsletter
- Pamphlet explaining the basics.

## **4. ALL-EMBRACING UNITY**

### **– Unconditional-love, mutual-concern, non-partisan**

- Not critical of differences in one another's worship style. *James 4 verse 11*
- By being accepting; particularly with those struggling with their faith within the church
- Not sharing the church is selfish
- Welcoming is good but we need to do better follow up when people leave drift away without noticing
- Coffee and tea before after and during the service
- Meeting people. Hear why people do what they do of volunteering
- Genuine authenticity
- Meeting and accepting people where they are at
- No cliques
- Everyone is precious, develop an awareness of other people's lives. A need to support existing members as well as new
- Authenticity
- Differences not division
- Unconditional love
- Respect
- Acceptance
- Speak words of encouragement encourage one another daily
- Call out the good things we see; other's devotions
- Acknowledge there are differences and that there is no right no wrong
- Forgiveness
- Tolerance
- Encouragement.

## **5. OUTWARD-FOCUSED SERVICE**

### **– Humble, generous, self-sacrificial**

- *John 3 verse 16*
- The Good Samaritan. *Luke 10 v25* - Give time to love your neighbour as yourself
- *Isaiah 6 verse 8* - Here I am send me
- *Matthew 25. 1-31* – Being like Jesus
- A willingness to give sacrificially, an awareness of what was sacrificed on our behalf and how we can pay that
- Generosity
- Humbleness
- Earn the right to serve to speak to listen to others
- Serve outside the church - Do this often outside the comfort zone and in unexpected situations?
- Sharing with wider community via Wesleys
- Share news work volunteering in external charities

- Generous
- Don't be afraid to make a mistake and learn from others
- Willingness to be involved, be committed and get stuck in
- Humility
- If we are called to live sacrificially, it is more about what is best for the whole, not me and my family?
- Generous with money and time less busy and more present
- Not self-sufficient or arrogant but humble walking in humility *Micah 6 verse 8*
- Sacrificial service
- Generous and loving

## **6. AUTHENTIC WITNESS**

### **– Honest, real, confident**

- *Isaiah 6 verse 8* - Here I am send me
- Confidence in sharing faith
- Conversations which are positive about the good going on
- Stories of good things God is doing
- Testimony
- Being willing to admit I struggle
- Admitting you make a mistake
- Go to someone and ask what are you thankful for? - any good news
- Genuine wish for others to experience what we have
- In coffee time reaching out to others not just your group
- Sharing with a neighbour how God has blessed us
- Humility, honesty
- Witnessing means knowing you can only tell what you actually know witness and understand.

### **OTHER COMMENTS**

- At the changeover have a circulation system. Coffee three times before in between and after
- Late finish for an earlier start
- Coffee time is busy and overcrowded
- Wesleys is important in formal is not understood contemporary is better
- Leaving service through Wesleys to fix in/out confusion issue
- Keep two separate services for both audiences will provide more joint sessions
- Make Wesleys the social place for both audiences to catch up
- Keep the congregations united - two communications the website and new sheet information board photos and address book
- Basket of healthy food for the children to tide them over
- Exit more people through this side doors.
- Additional and alternative coffee points
- People without portfolios