

Christ Church Rathgar - Mission Statement

*We are here to worship and serve God together, through prayer, praise and Bible Study.
We are here to be a caring source for others, Christ's instruments of peace, justice and love.
We stand for a united Church and welcome all Christian denominations to share in worship with us.*

INTRODUCTION

The Christ Church Rathgar (CCR) Mission Plan provides information for the outside reader about what our congregation does, and how we intend to improve and develop what we do. It helps members of our congregation understand where their church is going and encourages their participation in its development. It helps those responsible for the growth of the congregation and its life make sure that important matters are being attended to and to check that aims are being achieved. The plan is annually reviewable and subject to continuous development to which all may contribute.

The Session will set up a standing working group to meet at least four times yearly to review the progress of this mission plan and consider fresh ideas for inclusion in its successor, and report back to Session (Priority 1).

We recognize the need for a broad renewal of our congregation. This calls for a renewal of relationships within the congregation and a new commitment to proclaim the reality of the saving grace of Christ and His call to all humanity to become faithful disciples of the Living Lord. But the accomplishment of human plans depends on their being in accordance with God's will. We prayerfully rely on God's providence to bless our efforts to follow God as the Community of CCR.

MISSION

The congregation is determined to use its central position in Rathgar to God's advantage. Many people use the church buildings and car parks each day, and others walk through its property. CCR is ideally placed to be a church with an open door policy, an explicitly international outlook and a spiritual welcome for a culturally diverse international population. The congregation is fortunate in having an award-winning website at its disposal. We can advertise our presence with a modern outdoor interface to hundreds of people daily; in parallel a virtual (online) presence can be broadcast digitally via WiFi - as is done in other spaces such as Dublin Airport. The Session should immediately appoint a member to act as Communications Officer, charged as a priority with obtaining external advice regarding an outdoor media presence and an integrated digital(online) presence, and report before the end of 2016 (Priority 1).

Following the refurbishment of our halls in 2006, improving the facilities and making possible the provision of services to the community and the wider church, the property committee operates a detailed long-term and prioritised maintenance policy for premises of the Church and the manse. Considerable progress has already been made and further sections of the plan are continuously being implemented. A very high priority will be given to

improving our church heating system (Priority 2), and redecorating the interior of the church when recent repairs to damp patches on the walls have thoroughly dried out, (Priority 3).

We plan also to carry out a Community Audit by questionnaire with the results to be reviewed by Session during 2015 (Priority 4). The results can be used to guide the development of an open-door policy for CCR and the plans for the development of the church building in the Renaissance project. This imaginative plan proposes to modify the space of our sanctuary to meet the needs of our much smaller congregation without compromising on our ability to cater for larger numbers occasionally or in the longer term. It will create a warm, welcoming worship space for the next hundred years and for our as yet unborn congregation.

Our Youth Club welcomes many young people from outside the congregation and this form of Ministry makes an important contribution to the mission of CCR.

Overseas Mission - see under Ministry - Gujarat.

WORSHIP

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Ps 122.1 NIV

At Christ Church Rathgar there are two formal Services of Worship each Sunday, Holy Communion in the Chancel at 9.30 a.m. and Family Worship at 11.00 a.m. Many members of the congregation appreciate the opportunity to worship frequently at the table of the Lord.

Changes in society's attitude to Sunday observance have worked against regular church attendance on Sundays for many of our younger people and their parents. Arguments have been advanced to make changes in the times of the regular services. We intend by consultation and experiment to find the most acceptable arrangement.

Similarly the Sunday demands of school (sports) and youth orchestra rehearsals have hindered the efforts of the Youth and Family Worker to develop a band of young musicians to play at services. While the talent is there, and has been greatly appreciated by the congregation, it is difficult to arrange for the musicians' regular availability to perform at family worship. These efforts will continue.

Heaven is full of the eternal praise of Almighty God - Worship should be a joy, not a penance. Music in worship needs to be joyous and uplifting, and there is a wealth of material both in our hymn books and elsewhere which needs to be further explored and which we have commenced to introduce to our members. We are aware that many of our congregation prefer words and music which offer a deeper level of spiritual significance than the simple choruses of our childhood, but we intend to continue to introduce new musical material to widen the appeal of our worship music (Priority 1).

We intend to acquire new audio-visual technical facilities to add variety to and improve the worship experience - screens for words and pictures, and equipment to play Dvds, Cds, etc. We will supplement our hymn boards by electronic displays. As a very high priority a new sound amplification system will be installed (priority 1).

Representation on our worship committee will be widened to include representatives from the Youth and Family Committee and other members of the congregation to encourage wider congregational participation in worship - at present this is limited to the choir and volunteer readers. A wider variety of special services should be arranged with visiting or Gospel choirs enriching the worship experience from time to time.

DISCIPLESHIP

It is important that the congregation offers its members opportunities to build up their understanding and develop their experience of what it is to be followers of Jesus Christ their Saviour and to bear witness to His grace in the wider world.

The traditional means of developing discipleship have been Preaching, Worship, Prayer, and Bible Study. We expect that good preaching will not only remind the congregation of the boundless graciousness of God's love and of the salvation offered through His Son, but of the wealth of resources offered to his pilgrim followers through the Holy Scriptures. We expect that our congregation will be reminded of the world-wide and varied expression of faith in the lives of Christians, and of the continuing development of forms of witness and discipleship in other places. We expect that they will feel called to commit their lives to Christ and the continuing pilgrimage of the Christian life with its call to service and the development of the pilgrim's personal faith.

We hope that the practice of having two courses of Bible study, in Spring and Autumn, will be continued by our new Minister. New initiatives to establish groups active in the ministry of prayer will be undertaken. Wider participation in Worship will also encourage the congregation's love of these forms of discipleship.

It is very important to ensure that courses for those young people preparing to become adult members of the church build up their understanding of the Faith, their biblical knowledge and prepare them to use materials which will enable their further development and understanding. Special efforts must be made to ensure that those who have become full members become involved in the work and ministry of the church, committing themselves to the service of God through service to others. (Priority 2.)

We will continually look out for opportunities for the development of discipleship and ministry by arranging talks for members of our congregation on current issues involving religious values and for representatives of Christian charities to speak from the pulpit and at other meetings on social and environmental problems.

Members of the congregation are regarded as having a right as well as a duty to be involved in the activities of the congregation so far as is consistent with their abilities and availability, and we are committed to developing a culture of participation in Worship, Ministry and Fellowship. Further details will be found under these headings.

When the need becomes evident we will again arrange to run an Alpha course for those who would benefit from it either in our congregation alone or to share in one with our neighbouring congregations.

There are 22 active elders in the Session whose regular visits to their districts contribute importantly to integrating members into the church and building up their discipleship.

The Session has for several years organized an annual whole day conference, and will arrange further events for special purposes. For example, a detailed discussion of the reasons why members find regular attendance difficult would help Session to make effective plans to deal with the problem (Priority 1).

FELLOWSHIP

We enjoy Fellowship through shared worship, work and social activity. This sharing engenders strong bonds of friendship and respect. Fellowship is a gateway to a common goal, strengthens ties within the congregation and helps to lead people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

We encourage our members to extend a warm welcome to any newcomers to our church events and to invite them to join with us in our worship and activities. We note the particular interests of the newcomer with a view to integrating him or her into the fabric of the Church community. For example, new members may be invited to take part in our worship as stewards or readers, to help in the mothers and toddlers group, to join in the horticultural society's work, or in music for worship, or on the catering committee. We know that this approach bears, and has borne fruit.

To further this welcoming approach, it is intended to prepare a "welcome package" (to include a copy of the History of the Church in Rathgar for the first 150 years) for new members (Priority 2). This package will provide information about the congregation's leadership, and explain how members can participate in its activities, including the FWO (Free Will Offering), and the conditions under which they may become voting members.

Existing members will regularly be reminded of the opportunities for their participation and we will examine ways of assisting the organizers of the numerous regular ministries and activities to encourage volunteer helpers. Opportunities will also be found to continue and develop the more conventional social activities for the congregation. A weekly drop-in coffee centre has recently opened and we expect a larger number of members to attend there.

In encouraging a participatory model of church it is necessary to communicate effectively with our members and adherents. The congregation has a most effective and award-winning website and members may be kept abreast of activities by email and text message. We must encourage regular use of these facilities by church leaders and congregation members and develop the use of the more fashionable methods of communication. It is intended to give Cornerstone, the monthly publication, a radical improvement and to re-launch it when an editor is appointed (Priority 1).

The congregation also deserves as much information about the activity and decisions of the Church Committee and Session as can be given with due regard to the principles of confidentiality.

MINISTRY

Christians are commanded to love others as themselves and in Matthew Chapter 25 it is made clear that we encounter our Saviour in working to meet the needs of others. Ministry is the practice of our faith. Ministry is close to mission as the work of our ministry witnesses to the

nature of Christ and effective ministry acts to draw others to Him. But the purpose of ministry is to serve others as a valuable end in itself. When the congregation acts together to serve others fellowship is promoted and members of the congregation come to appreciate each other's spiritual gifts. It is necessary to ensure that opportunities to participate in ministry are open to all members of the congregation. For example, when newer members carry-out welcoming duty at the church door it helps them to feel accepted and to get to know existing members of Christ Church Rathgar.

Youth Work - The congregation is proud of its tradition of employing a youth and family worker to provide a range of activities for young people in the Rathgar community. Our clubs, which have a distinctively Christian ethos, are attended by young people from other religious traditions and none, as well as by the children of our members. Not only do these clubs contribute to the spiritual and social development and community awareness of their members and leaders, but they also exemplify the congregation's ministry through an annual Christmas lunch for elderly people. Senior club members undertake overseas working visits from time to time. It will be important for the congregation to ensure that this most worthwhile form of ministry is continued and developed in the next five years.

Ecumenical work - Involvement with local ecumenical activity is important to our congregation, especially since many of our members and their relatives were reared in other denominations. We cannot be other than loving and respectful to our family members. Rathgar and Terenure have an active ecumenical fellowship group within which we are represented. The phenomenon of sectarianism and Christian division runs contrary to the will of Christ as expressed in John 17 and undermines our claim to be the servants of the Prince of Peace. Maintaining this open ecumenical outlook is a very important value of our congregation and we look forward to strengthening our ties and developing new ways of working together with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Buildings - Many parts of our buildings are rented from time to time to local community groups. As well as contributing financially to the cost of their upkeep this practice performs an important service to voluntary groups and other start up organizations providing services to the local community, and brings a large number of visitors to our premises. The premises are also available to the usual uniformed groups of young people - Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and Beavers. A Romanian Baptist Congregation uses our buildings on a weekly basis for worship and other activities and we intend, in spite of some language barriers for the present, to strengthen our relationships with this congregation and develop further co-operation between us.

Financial contributions -

United Appeal - World Development Appeal - Moderator's Appeals - Retiring Collections. One form of Ministry is the contribution of monetary funds directly to charitable and other causes. In addition to the proceeds of special collections the congregation contributes about 10,000 euro annually to charitable causes from its general funds. When contributions to General Assembly Funds including the United Appeal are added, 35,000 euro was donated to others in total in 2014. It is hoped that this level of contribution will be maintained.

Mothers & Toddlers Group - The Congregation organizes a mothers and toddlers group which meets weekly in term time. It is well attended and has a waiting list. This involves some families with no formal church connection. This important work will continue

to be supported.

Meals on Wheels - Many years ago the church was instrumental in initiating a Meals on Wheels service which is now run on a community-wide basis, using the church halls and kitchens. Members of the congregation are among those providing deliveries and other help. The congregation aims to continue energetically its support of this important community service.

Pastoral Work - Our congregation's pastoral care for its members is also an important form of ministry. Its effectiveness can always be improved (Priority 1). It is necessary to look closely at how the organisation of the congregation's pastoral care may be improved so as to reduce the demands on the Minister's time and to enable better feedback and sharing of experience by visiting elders and others. It is not only elders who have gifts which make them capable of offering pastoral care.

Gujarat - Our congregation has contributed in various ways to the welfare of children of 'tribal ' groups in the Dangs area of Gujarat. At present we offer long-term support to ten daughters of migrant sugar-cane cutters in the care of a hostel in Vyara so that they can enjoy a continuous primary school education. The Dangs is an area where Christianity has been making very strong progress in recent years. The Congregation expects that under a new Minister the possibility of twinning with a Gujarati congregation in areas where Christianity has been established for longer will be fully investigated and brought to reality, to the mutual benefit of that congregation and ourselves.

New ministry opportunities - Christ Church Rathgar is actively looking for ways of extending our ministry in the community either on our own or with our fellow Christians in the area. For example, the church is only a stone's throw from a hospital which gives cancer treatment to patients from all over the country. We should examine the best way to develop opportunities of providing for the needs of patients and relatives who are staying in the area at this stressful time (Priority 2).

Christ Church Rathgar's ambition for 2015-2020 is to maintain and extend our existing forms of ministry and actively develop and improve what we do in relation to pastoral care, ecumenical witness and finding valuable new forms of service.