



Our Collective Mission Priorities

April 2018

The Christian life begins and ends in the heart of God:

As we worship him and become more like him (Up), we are drawn to love his people (In).

As his people, he sends us out to be and bring his good news to the world (Out).

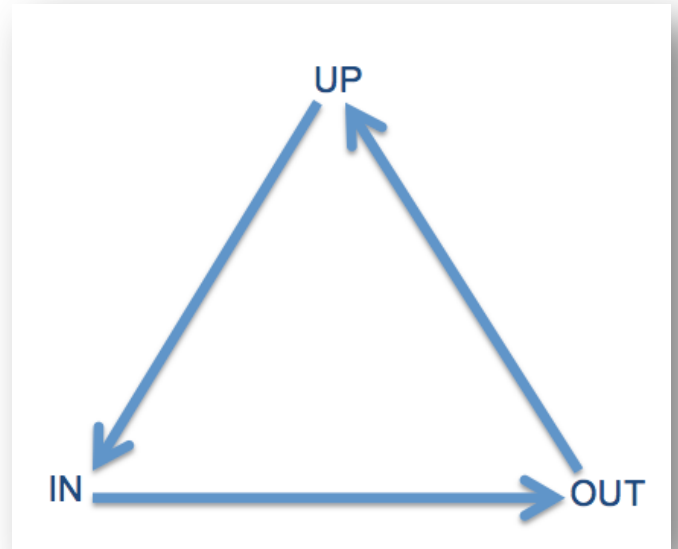
As we go to the world, we're driven back Up to God in dependence on him.

This leaflet is mostly about Out – but that doesn't mean our commitment to Up and In is dwindling – far from it! But we've been praying and thinking about how to bring focus to the Out aspect of our church life.

Jesus taught us to pray, **"Your kingdom come"** (Luke 11.2). He also commissioned his disciples to play their part in bringing God's kingdom, saying, **"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit"** (John 20.21-22).



rescue. By focusing our collective mission priorities, working collaboratively and undergirding all of this in prayer, we trust that we will have a greater impact for God's kingdom. May he be glorified as we step out in mission and his name is made known!



We're called as a church to *Love God, love each other and reach the world*. But 'the world' is a very big place! The first church began their mission where they were – in Jerusalem. As a local church, we have a particular responsibility to present the good news of Jesus where we are – our local area. God has put us here, in Shirley, in 2018, for a reason.

Even in our local area, there are many different needs and people groups who need to hear the good news about Jesus – more than we can manage by ourselves. Of course, we have God's powerful Holy Spirit helping us. But in the second half of 2017, to help us focus our local mission, we felt it right to ask the questions:

Who in particular is God calling us to reach over the coming years?

What are the issues that God is calling us as a church to speak into?

What are our 'Big Yeses'?

This leaflet explains the conclusions we have come to – the collective mission priorities we believe God wants us to focus on over the coming years. They are (in no particular order):



Teenagers

Why this area?

- teenagers ask big questions about life – and we want to help them consider Jesus as part of that. Many people who become Christians do so as teenagers
- our local community identified provision for teenagers as one of the top local needs
- our church also identified this group as a key group to work with

What do we do in this area already?

- for years 9-13: buzz.live youth services fortnightly on Sunday evenings and buzz.connect weekly gatherings on Tuesdays
- for years 6-8: buzz.ignite fortnightly Sunday morning sessions and buzz.torch fortnightly gatherings on Wednesdays
- we fund a youth worker to lead a team working with year 6 to year 13s

Financial hardship

Why this area?

- official data shows there is significant deprivation within our parish and in areas which come in to use the High Street
- this is our second greatest existing area of passion and involvement as a church community
- this area fits well with local charities we're also most involved with – SCRATCH and Basics Bank

What do we do in this area already?

- We partner with SCRATCH, Basics Bank and SAFE
- The Beacon – a missional community aiming to bring hope to those struggling financially, hosting regular drop-in meals and CAP Money courses

Children and families

Why this area?

- the largest age group in our parish is 30-44 year olds (many of whom have children)
- as a church, this is the area of local mission that we are most passionate about and involved with already
- children are very spiritually curious – yet we can't rely on schools or parents to tell the younger generations the good news about Jesus. New parents are often spiritually open, too

What do we do in this area already?

- The Ark – a weekly group for toddlers, babies and their parents or carers with coffee and crafts
- Superstars – a monthly Sunday morning event with breakfast, Bible story, songs, games and craft
- Pray n Play – a cell group for parents of pre-school children
- Allsorts – a missional community for people who want to reach out to children and families, hosting film afternoons and other events
- schools work – we fund a part time primary schools' worker to do assemblies and lessons. We also host and run Easter Experience (with lots of help from other churches)

Inter-cultural relations

Why this area?

- inter-cultural relations is the second highest concern of under 30s in our local area. A local councillor identified multi-cultural cohesion as a key priority, especially given the rise in hate crimes against Eastern Europeans since the Brexit vote

- minority ethnic groups in our local area have doubled in size in the last ten years – a trend which is increasing: a third of Southampton school-children are not ‘white British’
- as Christians, we have a message of good news for people from every people group and language

What do we do in this area already?

- two cell groups who make a point of welcoming overseas nationals to our area and church

Older people

Why this area?

- our local community identified better provision for older people as the top need in our local area
- as people come towards the end of their lives, they can be more spiritually open
- ministry to older people is an area many of us are already involved with or passionate about

What do we do in this area already?

- Evergreens and Luncheon Club – monthly events for anyone to come to
- Sunday @3 – a monthly Sunday afternoon church service, accessible to those with dementia
- Care homes services – monthly visits to 3 local care homes to chat with residents and give a short service
- These groups now come together under the oversight of an ‘Elderberries’ group

Environment

Why this area?

- this was high up on our list of existing topics we’re involved with and passionate about as a church
- many who aren’t Christians are increasingly passionate about the environment as well
- this links to our existing mission partners A Rocha and Andrew & Maria Leake

What do we do in this area already?

- the Boney cell group – taking a particular interest in developing the Boney as a good environment
- Green Angels – a group going out monthly to pick litter in the local area – with people from outside the church community joining in too
- EcoChurch team – helping us become more environmentally aware as a church community through A Rocha’s EcoChurch initiative

See also FAQ 5 below for more detail on this area.

Mental wellbeing

Why this area?

- this was recognised by all age groups in the community as a significant local need, most notably by under 30s
- our church discussions in the Autumn identified loneliness as a major problem – and this links strongly to mental well-being
- Jesus came to bring life to the full – body, mind and soul. Historically, churches haven't been great at encouraging mental well-being, yet a loving community is the ideal place for that to happen

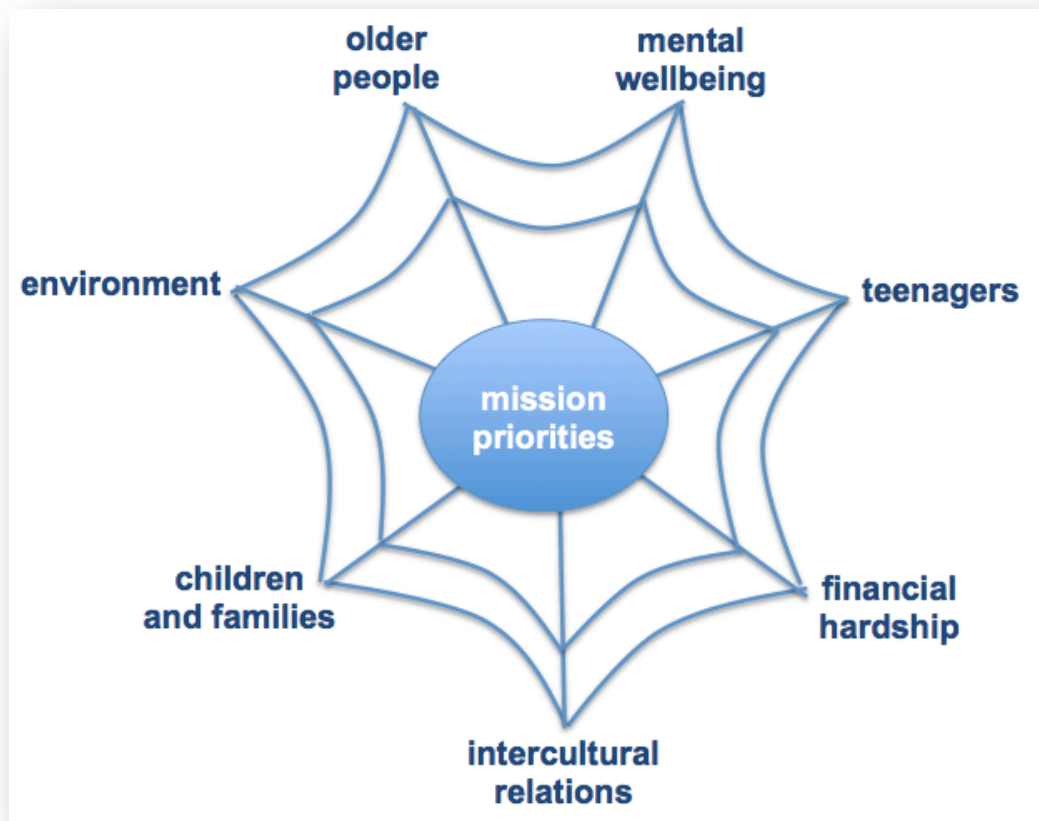
What do we do in this area already?

- we don't do anything formally in this area, but we do offer pastoral support to people across all age groups who struggle with low mental wellbeing; we also have several mental health professionals in our congregation

See also FAQ 4 below for more detail on this area.

Linking these seven areas: a mission web

In practice, these 7 areas overlap with each other: older people can be passionate about mental wellbeing; teenagers can care about the environment; people from overseas can struggle financially etc. In fact, there are probably ways in which each of the areas link to all of the other areas. This is what we're calling the *mission web*.



Rather than having 7 areas of mission all 'competing' against each other for volunteers and time, we want to encourage each of these 7 mission areas to be working collaboratively. For example, those looking to reach children and families

could team up with the environment groups for a litter pick; or when it becomes clear that an older person in our community is struggling financially, we can put them in touch with people from that mission area too; or someone committed to improving people's mental wellbeing might have a particular heart for teenagers.

As these 7 areas work collaboratively, our overall mission will become more effective.

What's going to happen next?

These are the areas of mission that God is calling us as a church to be involved with – so we need to join in with his mission! Every existing group (cell group, ministry area etc) will need to prayerfully reflect on where it fits in this mission web:

- Some groups will fit very easily in one of these priority areas (eg the Beacon fits snugly within the financial hardship area). Those groups or ministries will be carry on what they're doing already, but may need to team up with others in their ministry area as well, and will need to think about how they can link with the other 6 areas as well.
- Some groups won't fit in the mission web at the moment, but will prayerfully decide together that they want to start getting involved in a particular mission area. For example, a cell group might decide to start praying regularly for our outreach to children and families. That group would need to start liaising with others in that mission area to find out how it can pray specifically. Some from that cell group might also want to join in practically.
- Some groups won't fit in the mission web at the moment, and will feel pulled in different directions. For example, some in a cell group might feel drawn towards mission to older people whilst others feel pulled towards inter-cultural relations and still others to the environment. Such a group might prayerfully decide to draw to a close – with individuals joining different cell groups which reflect the mission areas they feel pulled towards. In this example, some might join Elderberries, some the international cell groups and some the Boney cell group.
- Some cell groups might fall somewhere in-between: the majority of members want to begin supporting one mission area, but one or two feel called in another direction. In that case, it would make sense for those one or two to move to a different cell group. Similarly, there may be people from other groups who come in to join those who are carrying on. Either way, the friendships from the original cell groups don't have to stop! But new ones will be made as well.

Everybody should join a group

We don't want anyone who's already in a cell group to stop being part of one, because cell groups can be great environment for helping us grow as Jesus' disciples. We will do all we can to help each person find the right group for them.

We will also encourage those who aren't currently in cell groups or missional communities to join one – whichever one reflects the mission priority area they feel drawn towards.

What if you don't feel drawn towards one of these 7 priority areas? See FAQ 2 below.

Anybody can join *any* group

You don't have to have children to feel God's heart for children and families. You don't have to be poor to feel God's heart for those facing financial hardship. So anybody can join any group.

In fact, if everyone involved in reaching out to older people is an older person themselves, that will be tricky! Likewise, if no-one involved in reaching out to other cultures is British, that won't send a good message! So for these mission areas to be effective, we *need* a whole variety of people to join in with each of these mission areas – prayerfully and practically.

One of our underlying hopes as we move towards this model of mission is that we will become more truly inter-generational as a church: we will have people of all ages praying and working together in mission. That will help our own discipleship as well, because we have much to learn from each other.

When will all this happen?

It will take a while for each individual and group to prayerfully discern their future direction in the light of these collective mission priorities. During the summer term (April – July) we are encouraging everyone to:

- come along to 2 central evenings (Thurs 10th May and Weds 13th June) where we will be helping each other to discern God's way forwards for us;
- chat with others about the 7 mission priority areas, to understand them better;
- pray (and fast?) about what God is calling us to as individuals and groups;
- Dan will also visit all the cell groups to chat through any questions and concerns you have, and for you to share with him your thoughts about the future for your groups

By the end of the summer term, we hope everyone will have a clear idea of which mission area they want to be part of – and if necessary, they can move or join cell groups at that point.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I can't see anything here for my age group – why not?

Please don't read these 7 priority areas as saying that we're only interested in children and families, teenagers and older people! Our church is rightly made up of people of all ages – and we want it to stay that way. We are choosing to focus our mission on these 7 areas, but it needs people of all ages to help that happen. For

example, we need the vision and energy of Generation Y, and the wisdom and experience of empty-nesters.

Some age groups have particular thematic concerns – for example, many of the younger generations are more concerned about mental well-being and inter-cultural integration than older generations.

See also ‘Anybody can join any group’ above.

2. What if I don't feel drawn to one of these 7 mission areas?

That's ok! If God really is calling us focus on these 7 areas as a church, we would expect him to lay at least one of these 7 areas on our hearts as individuals. But that won't always happen. If, having prayed about it, you don't feel drawn to any of these areas, we'd encourage you just to join in with one of them anyway. You may find that as you begin praying into some of the situations, opportunities or ministries you hear about, that God will begin to draw your heart in to that area more as well. But if, after a while, you're still not feeling drawn to that area, it would be fine to switch to another area.

3. What about our own spiritual growth – we can't do mission all the time?!

The focus of this leaflet has been on our collective *mission* priorities. But that is only one point of the discipleship triangle, as we said at the start. It is vital that we focus Up (on God) first, to hear from him and become more like him. It is equally important that we focus In (to each other), to help and support each other. But we also have a responsibility, as a community, to reach Out to a needy world in mission. As we do that, we're drawn back Up to God in prayer and petition as we step out of our comfort zones and plead with him for the needs of his world.

In the past, some cell groups have been strong at the Up and In elements, but not strong at the Out element. Jesus' model of discipleship included all 3 elements - he sent his disciples out on mission as well as teaching them to love God and love each other. If we really want to grow as disciples, we need to keep a balance between Up, In and Out. We hope that by encouraging each cell group to adopt an 'Out' focus that will help to deepen our discipleship, not detract from it. Our missional communities have been using this Up, In and Out model for a few years and finding it works well.

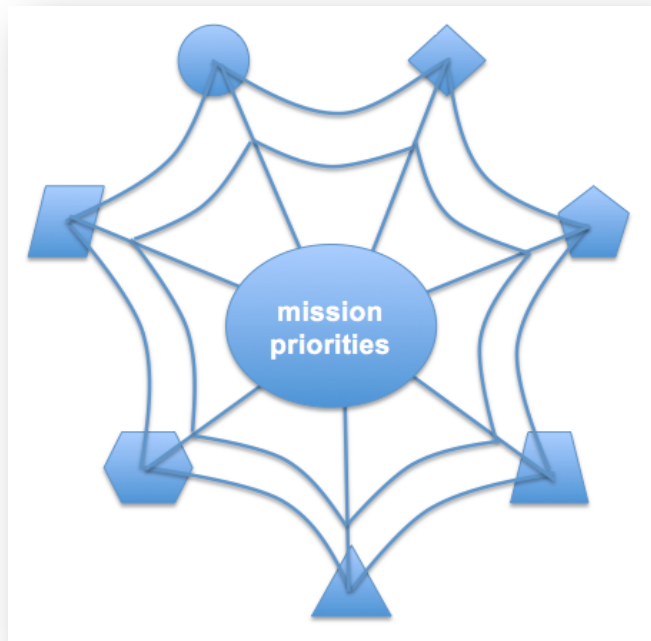
To help ensure a balance between these different elements, we may suggest from the Autumn that groups spend

- one week a month focusing on Up (for example in prayer and Bible study)
- one on In (for example, having a meal together or helping each other practically)
- one on Out (for example, praying about their priority area, or running an event)
- one on Of (coming together centrally to hear what God is doing across the church and the mission priority areas)

4. Will all the mission areas look the same?

No. Some areas will be quite big, encompassing several cell groups, a missional community and various ministries (such as the children and families area, at the moment). Others will be very small to begin with (such as the mental wellbeing area

– that might just start with one cell group). It doesn't matter if the areas are quite different in size. They can each develop and change at their own pace. The big areas will need to make sure they're well coordinated; the small areas will need to make sure they don't over-stretch themselves. We will support each area, no matter how big or small it is.



For those who like pictures, this diagram may help: each of the 7 areas are represented by different shapes, indicating that each mission priority area will develop its own shape and style over time, as those within it pray and follow God's leading.

5. Isn't getting involved with mental wellbeing a bit dangerous?

Everyone is somewhere on the continuum of mental health or mental illness – and we move up and down that continuum through our lives. Those near the 'mental illness' end need clear medical intervention – although they also need the love and care of friends and family. Those whose mental wellbeing is moderate but sliding 'down' the scale can often be given simple steps to help combat further deterioration.

We will set up a working group of people with expertise in this area who will help advise us on what we can and cannot realistically hope to do. It should certainly be possible for us to help people's mental wellbeing, and to help those who support people whose mental wellbeing is low. The whole area of mental wellbeing is certainly a massive issue in our society at the moment. More and more churches and Christian organisations are being proactive in this area.

6. How can 'the environment' be a mission priority – it's an entity, not a group of people?

Jesus brings good news to all creation – not just to humanity. God created our world and will one day renew all creation. Part of our Christian calling is to love the world that God has made and be good stewards of it (Genesis 2.15). Therefore taking care of the environment is one of the '5 marks of mission' as defined by the Anglican church.

Care of the environment is also a massive concern in our wider society. As we step up our involvement in this area, it will give us greater integrity in the eyes of others who are passionate about this topic. We have also already seen that working in this area gives us opportunity to work alongside and befriend secular eco-warriors!

7. Will my group need to stop?

That is up to each group or ministry area to prayerfully decide for themselves. (See 'What's going to happen next?' above.)

Over recent years, we've seen that it's important for some groups or ministries to stop – it gives the necessary space for new dreams to emerge. It's also a biblical pattern of death followed by resurrection. Separately, we've seen that other groups are given a new lease of life by having a new and specific mission focus to them.

8. Seven priorities seems too many – I thought we were supposed to be cutting back?

The PCC didn't feel it was their place to cut back on specific activities, especially when members weren't directly involved with them. We will encourage each mission priority area to review what it does at the moment, and consider whether any of their activities need to be stopped or changed – with the aim of making us more fruitful for the Kingdom of God.

If, after people have prayerfully reflected on these mission priorities and indicated which area they're going to commit to, it becomes obvious that some of the areas don't have sufficient numbers of people engaged – so be it! That will be God's way of telling us that 7 is indeed too many for us.

9. What about other activities I'm involved in which aren't included here?

It's important to distinguish between things that God calls us to be involved in *as individuals*, and those things he calls us to be involved in *as part of our church*. Some people term these our 'personal preferences' and our 'corporate responsibilities'. We are not saying that people have to give up their personal preferences. So if you are a street pastor or school governor or stop and chat with homeless people on the street – God bless you! Friends from church will still have opportunity to pray for you and support you in that outreach. But we as a church are deciding to focus our attention on these 7 areas.

10. Where does sharing the good news about Jesus fit in with this?

As a church, we're called by God to present the good news of Jesus to our local area. We need to present the good news in word and deed, and in a way people can understand. We can't wait for people to come to us; we have such good news to share that we don't want to keep it to ourselves!

By identifying these 7 priority areas, we're not trying to become glorified social workers. We want to bring a gospel of hope (not merely a gospel of help) to people in these 7 areas. But we know that many people need to see that we genuinely love

people (expressed in practical ways and in loving relationships) before they are willing to listen to us talking about the even greater love God has for them in Christ.

Many of us are probably more confident helping people practically than we are at talking about Jesus. We will need to do further work on having confidence so that we can “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have” (1 Peter 3.15).

11. Why do we even need *collective* mission priorities?

When Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20.21) – the *you* was plural. As the leader of CMS wrote recently, “Mission is always a collaborative, not a solo, activity. We’re used to nineteenth-century biographies of missionary heroes, but the true biblical model is not of the lone hero, but of the people of God together engaged in God’s mission.”

When we do mission together, it’s more effective: we’re able to encourage one another through difficult times and help one another practically; other people are also able to see the difference that being a Christian makes to our relationships and outlook. Some of us are good at praying, others at helping practically, others at talking about Jesus. As we work together in mission, we can point people to Jesus.

12. How did we discern these collective mission priorities?

During the Autumn of 2017, we had a four-fold listening process:

- listening Up - to God in prayer
- listening In - to each other, to hear what burdens God has put on our hearts as individuals
- listening Out - to our wider community, to hear what they perceive as the key needs in our local area
- listening Of – to other parts of the body of Christ locally (ie other churches), to hear what ministries they are engaged in

13. What about our international links – why aren’t they mentioned?

Our international partnerships are very important to us. We have so much to learn from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. It will make sense for all our mission partnerships to flow out of our local mission priorities – that will help us build deeper partnerships. For example, it may be that we begin taking a particular interest in mental wellbeing or environment issues in Bupadhengo.

As these 7 priority areas settle down, our External Missions Support Group will be able to review our existing partnerships in the light of these mission priority areas.

14. What about the High Street – have we given up on that idea?

Not necessarily. Our plans for a café as a community hub haven’t materialised, but the High Street is still a gathering place for many people – including many of these 7 priority areas. So it may be that God will still lead us to do something bold on the High Street, tying in with one or more of these priorities.

15. What about other local churches – what are they doing?

We work closely with Churches Together in Shirley and Southampton Christian Network to share expertise and help, and to make sure that we're not doubling-up with what other churches are doing. They are our brothers and sisters in the Kingdom, not competitors! If people have particular passions for ministry areas that we haven't identified, we will happily point people towards what other churches are doing. For example, Christ Church Freemantle and Shirley Baptist are both actively involved with homeless people.

16. What are missional communities?

We have had two missional communities for a few years. They are groups of Christians within our congregation committed to reaching out together in particular ways. Allsorts focus on reaching families. They meet together regularly for prayer and Bible study, and also host family film afternoons, monthly community meals and occasional open events (eg Pancake day or Bonfire night). Some members are also involved in The Ark and school prayer groups.

The Beacon focus on those with financial hardship. They meet together regularly for prayer and Bible study, and also host drop-in meals, run CAP money courses and deliver hampers. In their prayer triplets, they often still pray for each other's home and workplace situations. One member said recently that in all her years of being a Christian, this was the best church small group she's been in – because it has an outward-looking purpose giving a greater sense of being a team together.

17. What about groups like SatNavs or Men in Boots?

SatNavs and Men in Boots are walking groups for women and men respectively. They are purely social, and can be a good place to bring along friends who aren't Christians. As with all groups, we'd encourage those groups to see where they fit in to the mission web. It may be that on some walks, they try to tie in with one of the mission areas. For example, making a particular point of encouraging people from different cultural backgrounds to a walk around Remembrance Day, or collaborating with the environment mission priority area to devise a walk helping walkers understand their environmental impact more. But it will be up to each group themselves to pray and work out exactly how they respond to these mission priority areas.

18. Who can I talk about this with?

Do come along to the two central evenings (10th May and 13th June) where we will tease all of this out some more. Dan will visit all of the cell groups and missional communities this term (often with Katy Barnes, our pastoral care co-ordinator). But if you'd like to chat individually about any of this, do get in contact with:

Jacqui Dowdell (leadership warden) – jacqui.dowdell@gmail.com

Peter Craggs (leadership warden) - p_craggster@hotmail.com

Nigel Hughes (local mission coach) – nigel@stjamesbythepark.org

or other members of the PCC (whose photos are in the porch of the church building)