

**FROM CHRIST CHURCH TO CHRISTCHURCH AND  
BEYOND**

**A BOOKLET TO DESCRIBE THE EVOLUTION OF  
CHRISTCHURCH FROM 1989 UNTIL 2020**

**Our thanks to HUGH STEBBING  
for compiling this update until 2016**



*Updated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

In 1989 the Rev'd Noel Sandford produced a booklet that imaginatively and creatively described the period from the birth of the idea for the church that became Christ Church and the period of 150 years that followed its consecration. That booklet described a series of adaptations to the original building, its status within the Anglican Church in Clevedon and the role Christ Church played in the rapidly growing town of Clevedon.

Since that time, and during the subsequent 27 years, there has been no cessation in the pattern of site development, organisational change and mission that have characterised the Church since its foundation.

This pamphlet seeks to describe this latter day evolution of Christchurch (note the change of name – and see later...) and can be seen as a continuation of the history of the church explained so descriptively and in much greater detail in Noel's booklet. As such the two can be read consecutively to extend the story of Christchurch to the full 177 years until Spring 2016. The author makes no apology for the more extensive text concerning the Ecumenical Partnership and the Regen Project since both have been such momentous events for the church

The author, Hugh Stebbing, with his wife Christine and three daughters moved to Clevedon in 1988 and joined Christ Church in 1989. They departed the area on moving home to East Sussex in 2016. This period of involvement at Christchurch matches precisely that covered by this pamphlet. Over the period Christine was Churchwarden for two periods of time, Hugh was a member of the Church Council for 15 years, was a member of the Merger Steering Group and later Chair of the Regen Project. Between them they can bring helpful insights to the way Christchurch evolved. Hugh uses facts but also offers personal narrative where opinion is expressed. In this context such comments are uniquely his own and may not be shared by others!

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Michael Hayes 1988

Terry Baillie 1996 – 2012

Clive Jennings 200 onwards as Senior assistant Anglican Priest in the United Benefice with pastoral oversight of Christchurch

Tim Daniel 2005 – 2010 Methodist Minister

Russ Herbert 2010 onwards Methodist Minister

Trevor Cranshaw 2013 -2018 Anglican Minister United Benefice

Clive Jennings 26<sup>th</sup> February 2018 – onwards as Anglican Incumbent  
Christchurch

Christ Church Anglican Church from consecration in 1939 until 2005.

Linden Road Methodist Church from foundation until 2005

Christchurch Methodist Anglican Ecumenical partnership from 2005 onwards.

26<sup>th</sup> February 2018 Christchurch became a Benefice in its own right Benefice of Christchurch Clevedon.

## **PART I: THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH**

Having stated life as a church without a parish, fighting hard and eventually being granted parish status in 1940 only for that to be removed in 1983 when, because of a shortage of man-power, Christ Church had to be United with Clevedon St. Andrew's as a United Parish with the vicar of St. Andrew's having the living.

Christ Church played its full part in the business of this arrangement, but it was not to last. In 1997 it became necessary to make further changes and the group of three churches, St. Andrew's, Christ Church and St. Peter's, were re-organised again – this time to become a United Benefice. In some ways this variation in the structure meant that little really changed for the congregations. However, the perceived advantage of the Benefice structure was that it gave each church a greater sense of independence within the triumvirate. Each had a Church Council with responsibility for their own finances and each paid a Parish Share to the Diocese of Bath and Wells though the precedence of the Incumbent of St. Andrew's remained paramount.

And so it remained until 2003 when a visit by Rev'd. Tim Daniel to Rev'd. Terry Baillie was to set in motion a chain of events of huge magnitude for Christ Church.

For some time Linden Road Methodist Church had been seeking a solution to a problem it had with its church building in Clevedon. Thus far no solution had presented itself and the conversation that Tim Daniel initiated with Terry Baillie was in some ways a desperate final effort to find an answer though it also embraced a creatively radical suggestion. Ecumenical partnerships were not new but the idea that Linden Road and Christ Church might formally merge with the consolidated "new" church based on the Christ Church site was more akin to a corporate business merger than the sort of thing churches might do! This and the opportunity to carry out modifications to the

existing Christ Church buildings with sale proceeds of the Linden Road site being the core funding for such a capital project, were met with an invitation for more detailed discussions during which the initial seeds of the idea could be developed and debated and the proposition thoroughly understood by members of both denominations.

With enthusiasm for the concept of an ecumenical partnership a Steering Group was established to study all areas of church life. Mission, Pastoral work, Property, Organisation were just some of the key aspects that were scrutinised with the resultant conclusion jointly by the churches and their congregations that the merger was, indeed the way ahead. Interestingly this work identified that the aspects of the merger that were initially thought to be intractable, or requiring of too great a level of compromise, were, in reality both few in number and without exception a consequence of local custom and practise rather than ordained centrally by either of the denominations. They could be and were all resolved amicably.

With a way ahead mapped out it became necessary to formalise the new joint structure. Support was obtained from Methodist Connexion and the Diocese of Bath and Wells and, with respective head office lawyers giving constructive guidance, a suite of legal documents was put in place. These included a Sharing Agreement and a Constitution for the merged church – now to be called Christchurch to reflect the new beginning as an Ecumenical Partnership but to distinguish it from the former Christ Church since the new one was on its site. A Mission Statement set out the future agenda Christchurch – to Build, Grow and Reach Out to bring more to Christ using the building as hub as this vision is extended looking out across and into the community.

On 5<sup>th</sup> June 2005 Christchurch Methodist Anglican Ecumenical Partnership came into being – undoubtedly the most significant change in the histories of the two donor churches. The new church

would be administered by an Ecumenical Church Council comprising equal numbers from the legacy churches as befitted the equality of the merger. Only where it was required for specific reasons such as church law or finances would either denomination have to convene their respective Church Council or Parochial Church Council members of whom would be formed from within the new Ecumenical Church Council. The Sharing Agreement set out the basis for the use of the buildings and the costs associated with them and the basis for the appointment of clergy in future years.

That the merger process worked so well was very much because the approach that was adopted had more in common with due diligence undertaken in the corporate world than the thin veneer of analysis, challenge and testing sometimes adopted in church circles where “the greater force of God” can become an excuse for not doing the proper job. In any event, the use of workstreams, coupled with study groups extending involvement beyond the Steering Group gave depth and intensity to all the work that was done – and all to very positive effect.

The launch of the Ecumenical Partnership was a significant event with the presentation of a Certificate signed by both the (Methodist) Chairman of Bristol District and the (Anglican) Bishop of Bath and Wells. However, for the congregations the event marked the culmination of several months of shared experiences during which joint services and social activities had been held in both churches. By these means the two bodies had become fully introduced prior to the formal Partnership at which point they became one family in Christ.

Three clergy were in post as the Ecumenical Partnership was launched in 2005 – Rev’d. Tim Daniel and Rev’d. Terry Baillie with Rev’d. Clive Jennings as a Senior Assistant Priest. Soon afterwards Clive Jennings assumed a more focussed role in Christchurch leaving Terry Baillie, as

the Incumbent of the United Benefice, to focus his energies on St. Andrew's and St. Peter's.

Having successfully seen through the evolution, introduction and success of Christchurch Tim moved on and Terry retired in 2012. Tim took a post in Wales in the Baptist Church.

Tim's successor from the Methodist line was Rev'd. Dr. Russell Herbert who arrived in 2010 as Superintendent for the Gordano Valley Circuit in Bristol District. The new Incumbent at St' Andrew's, Rev'd. Trevor Cranshaw, was appointed in 2013 after a period of interregnum. Though he had ultimate legal responsibility of Christchurch from the Diocesan perspective (it is a constituent of both the United Benefice and the Gordano Valley Circuit) it is recognised and understood that Revd Clive Jennings continued with the day to day responsibility of that church alongside Russ Herbert and this arrangement proved highly effective.

Throughout this period of change Christchurch has accelerated the way it brings forward candidates for ministry training – whether this be ordained service or lay work. It has been a strength of the Ecumenical Partnership that momentum in such training has been accomplished and Christchurch celebrates that it is a “sending church”.

Another significant facet of the merger discussions related to the proposal to modernise the Christchurch buildings to equip them for future generations. This idea had been an inherent feature of the partnership plan and to that end a specific Statement of Need was prepared in readiness for the merger launch event. However, it was equally clear that since funds from the sale of the Linden Road building could not be available until after a sale had actually occurred and the two congregations were entering “new territory” together it would make sense to assume any project would take place after a suitable period of shared new experiences. In this way the Statement of Need,



initially based on assumptions, could be tested and proved so that the high capital expenditure expected would be as wisely invested as could be. That wise decision led to the Regen Project started in 2011 by which time funds had been secured and a clear and thoroughly informed brief of requirements established.

## **PART II – THE CHURCH BUILDING**

Readers of Noel Sandford's booklet will have seen clearly that throughout its first 150 years the original church design by Messrs Rickman and Hussey had been substantially adapted. Over the period there had been various internal modifications to the layout and a sequence of differently configured extensions to provide rooms and a hall, notwithstanding that the overall plan was un-coordinated with a number of different floor levels and an unappealing access.

After 1989 this process continued unabated. The key events were:

1989 – a crèche was built in the north west corner of the church beneath the gallery.

1992 – work started on an additional meeting room, to become known initially as the Beswick Room after a long-standing Christ Church family. The design for this room was by church member and architect Edmund McManus RIBA. Construction was by L.B.J Builders started on 10<sup>th</sup> February and was completed in time for a formal opening on 12<sup>th</sup> September by the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

1996/7 – repairs to the tower clock. The weights had “fallen off” and were refitted.

1999 – in January the choir pews were relocated to give more space in the nave. Church lighting was also replaced.

2000 – choir pews were removed and stored temporarily in the gallery and elsewhere

2002 – the toilets were adapted with a disabled facility added. The kitchen was refitted and remodelled.

2007/8 – Three pews were removed from the rear of the church to increase circulation space

2009/10 – ladders in the tower were repaired

2011 – 2013 – Regen Project



*The church prior to the 2011 Regen Project*



## REGEN PROJECT:

As you will have read the modernisation of Christchurch was a significant factor in the discussions that led to the merged church in 2005. The Regen Project was the consequence of the property aspect of these discussions.

With the initial Statement of Need in place by June 2005 and the decision soon afterwards to defer any specific work to allow for early learning from the merger in practise and ensure funds had become available from the sale of the Linden Road site, it was not until 2011 that work started on site.

The intervening several years were not wasted. By 2007 a detailed review had been completed to document the key social changes in Clevedon and the evolution of the church fabric. Reference to the Somerset Records Office and a laborious trawl of the various Faculty, plans and other documentation ensured that a full architectural history of the Church was completed. As a Building Listed as being of Architectural and Historic Interest at the Grade 2\* level it was anticipated that major changes to the property might have to be hard won against those who might argue for the status quo. In the event, the painstaking work confirmed that within the church itself virtually every item of fixture and fitting had been changed since the first building and that only the external walls, roof, tower and gallery were from the original designs. In fact, the tower has been adapted too, with the addition of the four stone finials which did not form part of the initial design. And there were contemporary etchings to prove the point. Armed with this compendium of crucial information and with a mildly revised Statement of Need a selection of architects was made resulting in Messrs. Chedburn Dudley of Bath being appointed to prepare plans for major work.

Chedburn Dudley had great experience in church work and Senior Partner George Chedburn was a member of the highly influential Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) which advised the Bishop of Bath and Wells on projects that required a Faculty before they could be implemented. Having a Faculty would be vital for the project proposed by Christchurch. All Church of England buildings have a specific exclusion from normal Town and Country Planning procedures on the basis that the DAC would responsibly act in their stead obtaining views from bodies such as English Heritage and The Victorian Society in precisely the same way as would be done by Local Authority Planning Department.

After various discussion by the Ecumenical Church Council an initial budget limit of £1.5million was set. This recognised the sizeable core funding from the Linden Road sale and the application of that church's established property fund to the Christchurch project of the now merged churches. However, the budget was seen to be hugely demanding with the need for at least 50% to come from finance raised by the congregation and applications to Charitable Trusts.

During 2008 initial design ideas were developed and progress was such that in June 2009 the Regen Project became live. Various working groups of church members generated detailed requirements for their areas of expertise ranging from IT and technology, church office to worship area and music group needs. These Working Groups – TOGS (Task Orientated Groups) gave invaluable data to the architects but, additionally, were seen as a mechanism to broaden direct engagement in the project.

By this time a formal Project Team had been created to organise and Project Manage the totality of the design, fundraising, fitting out and temporary accommodation aspects of Regen in a co-ordinated and professional way. The scale of what was involved was too great to be

left to chance. The Project Team included Clive Jennings, Tim Daniel (followed by Russ Herbert) Dave Gurl, John de Borde, Edmund McManus, David Eggeston, Vanessa Griffiths, Pete Wedlake and Christine Stebbing (the latter three as Church Wardens over the course of the project). It reported to the Ecumenical Church Council as the ultimate responsible body and was chaired by Hugh Stebbing. This team included an architect, two chartered surveyors and a chartered accountant with a good blend of wider skills from other members.

The original target “go-live” date after completion of work was considered to be no earlier than June 2012. In the event this was put back mainly because of the need to complete a number of legal agreements relating to the site. Fortunately, Christchurch had never had any burials within the grounds but the site – as with other Anglican churches – was technically owned by The Church Commissioners. Approval from that body was required to enable the project to proceed but the complication of the Ecumenical Partnership wishing to spend funds from the two constituent denominations was a totally new dimension for it. Equally, and very logically, The Methodist Church, which was contributing such a large sum, would need some assurances that it would be entitled to some financial return in the conceivable but highly unlikely event of the closure of the church and the sale of the building by the Commissioners.

Innovative thinking was required, and a solution was reached to this unique problem. Part of the site where it was planned to build the new hall, rooms and entrance lobby, would be released from Church Commission ownership and control of it passed to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) (the Anglican standing council within the Ecumenical Church Council) so that the PCC could enter into an Agreement with the Methodist Church that would entitle that body to receive a proportion of proceeds of sale of that portion of the site should it be sold within a defined period of time during which the

amount the Methodist Church could recover was on a sliding scale down to zero. Working with lawyers from both the Diocese and Methodist Connexion documentation had to be produced from scratch for the entire package of changes. There were no precedent templates for what was needed so drafting and agreement was time consuming. This did, though, give additional time for fundraising which was vital since it was looking likely that the initial £1.5m budget could not be achieved and it was a fundamental decision that no orders for work would be placed unless all costs could be met from the outset.

Chedburn Dudley's plans offered the flexibility of uses that was the overarching requirement of the Statement of Need and after consideration of a number of options a design was agreed. This combined a church space cleared of pews and with new, flat flooring with a modernistic new extension for a new hall, meeting rooms and facilities. Neither English Heritage, nor the DAC were convinced by the design for the new extension but a revised version with the new hall echoing the shape of the church walls and roof did find strong favour. The design was agreed and "frozen" by the Project Team so that the architects could prepare detailed drawings and specification and seek tenders for the work.

The preferred approach was for a single contract to be awarded covering all the work, though a two-phase option was retained pending the contractor's prices and the certainty of matched funding. In the event the single-phase route was adopted though not before some adjustment to the design to omit a small but very costly first floor extension alongside the new hall.

By mid July 2011 church activities had moved temporarily to St. Nicholas Chantry School dining room. This enabled Christchurch to be cleared of 150 years of accumulated effects, the removal and sale of the pews and preparation of the buildings in readiness for the arrival

of the contractors. C.S.Williams had been appointed to undertake the contract and started on site on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011 under the supervision of Chedburn Dudley and managed by the Regen Project Team completed work within budget.



*Construction of the new hall, 2011*

The first service in the remodelled facilities took place on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2012. Through the course of the work the earlier hall and rooms, with the exception of the more recently built “Beswick Room”, were demolished to make way for a new and larger suite of spaces linked by a welcoming reception foyer from which two new openings gave access to the church. Here a new flat floor with free standing, stackable chairs, state of the art technical facilities and lighting and a remodelled chancel offered a large clear area for a range of church service formats and other activities. With the exception of the gallery a flexible, usable and brand new area was created within the walls and roof of the Victorian church.



From a dark and rather forbidding nave emerged a light, bright and welcoming modern church. Truly a new place befitting the vibrancy of the Ecumenical partnership in action and outreach.

Throughout the demolition and construction phases one feature remained dominant. As part of the merger launch in July 2005 a large cross had been moved from Linden Road and installed at high level in the chancel at Christchurch. Not only was this a symbol of the new beginning but it was also a mark of continuity and homecoming for those who were making the move “up the hill” from their temporary residence at St. Nicholas Chantry School to a new place. That cross stayed in place throughout the extensive Regen work and provided, not only a statement of God’s glory to the contractor’s workforce, but offered a Faithful line of connection between the pre and post project configurations. It was there when the congregation returned to the building on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

Completion of Regen cost £1.3m after all associated expenses. If flexibility and fitness for purpose are the measures against which such an expensive building Project must be measured, then it seems clear that the new extensions and reordering of the church spaces have given what was desired. The truer test is how Regen has better enabled Christchurch to deliver against its Vision following God’s lead to be:

- One in Christ
- Grow more disciples, and
- Serve the community

Evidence by 2016 suggests that Christchurch post Regen is revitalised, more relevant and growing in ways unimaginable not only in either the Linden Road building or the older Christ Church, but also by those who put their trust in God’s guidance to bring an idea to fruition. Part III gives some substance to this view.



*The church following the Regen Project, 2012*



### **PART III- THE CHURCH AT WORK**

Just as the entirety of the buildings had been modernised within the shell of the original church, so the period covered by this booklet also was one of huge evolution for those involved in the work of the church, in the delivery of its mission and in the ways they stretched out to the wider community and the unchurched.

Back in 1989 church was still a place people went to; seldom did church go to people. There certainly was a view that somehow Christianity touched everybody, either because of a grounding provided by religious education classes in schools, because of family history or because, through the Church of England, Christianity was the established church of the nation. And wasn't the Queen also defender of the Faith?

However, the latter years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were already demonstrating the signs of religious strain which were to become magnified in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>. The emergence of blended families, single parent families, the breakdown of historically "normal" family and working relationships, greater mobility of labour plus the rapid growth in non-Christian faiths, had dramatically modified the social landscapes in which the church sought to operate.

Christchurch could not be immune to these factors. In 1989 it seemed strong and had a solid cohort of highly supportive members with a good number of children to attend Sunday School. However, there was little clear strategy for building greater attendance and, inevitably, once children became adults and moved away from Clevedon for higher education, work or marriage numbers attending Sunday services began to sharply decline. Perhaps, for some who had previously attended church with their children, now adults, there was no longer a priority to be at Christ Church.

At that time there were two and sometimes three services each Sunday. In addition to a Communion at 8.00am once per month each Sunday had a morning and evening service. Inevitably the morning service, with its children's groups, was the most popular but both were relatively traditional in style with robed choir, predominantly organ-led hymns and liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer. Mission Praise was used for any worship songs which were guitar led and only at the opening sequence of the morning service.

Mission giving tended to be focussed on the annual project promoted by the United Parish/Benefice which for several years, raised annually of the order of £7,000 in donations for the stated cause. Births, deaths and marriages took place and church groups met across the weeks using the church hall and rooms. Occasionally the church hall was used for birthday and anniversary celebrations for church members, and occasionally, schools would hold Carol and Foundation services at Christ Church.

And so it was that a church that seemed vibrant and busy when this author joined it in 1988 was now losing members and feeling staid. Change was needed. Change came. Inevitably, the catalyst was the arrival in 1996 of Rev'd Terry Baillie from inner city Bedminster, Bristol, to be the United Benefice Incumbent in succession to Rev'd Michael Hayes who had moved to a parish in Buxton, Derbyshire. Soon after Terry's arrival decisions were made to modify the ways music was provided for services at Christchurch. In January 1999 choir pews were relocated to enlarge the chancel "stage" area and in the following year they were removed entirely and put into storage. The choir would now be a Music Group, robes were discarded and more modern styles of worship songs introduced. Projection of images onto a drop-down screen and the first serious moves towards the use of audio-visual support in services were hints of new formats yet to come.

These adaptations were not universally welcomed. Despite great pastoral effort several members of the “old” choir departed to another church where they could maintain the style with which they were accustomed. This was a painful time for Christ Church members, but trust was placed in the lead being provided by God that the steps taken would open new doors of opportunity.

The early years of the millennium saw continuing downward pressure on membership though a number of new initiatives created expectation that decline in church attendance, evident nationally, could be reversed in Christ Church. Two “Awaydays” had debated ideas from throughout the congregation and led to the creation of a strategy to disciple outwards from the church building to grow beyond it.

Growing a church takes time and so it was that before these ideas could bear fruit the Ecumenical Partnership was created. The merger discussions had demonstrated with absolute clarity that the desires of both Linden Road and Christ Church were closely aligned, that the prospects of achieving them would be much greater with the two joined together and that, additionally, the energies of the two congregations combined could generate as yet unimagined new opportunities.

**Christchurch**  
| [www.christchurch-clevedon.org.uk](http://www.christchurch-clevedon.org.uk)

The objectives of the Ecumenical Partnership were clear:

Vision:

- To be one in Christ
- To grow more disciples
- To serve the community

And Mission to achieve the Vision:

- Build
  - Seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to build us up as God's people
- Grow
  - Seeking to
    - share worship and teaching
    - Offer ways for all ages to be nurtured
    - Learn and build faith
- Reach Out
  - Sharing faith and demonstrating God's love and care for the world
  - Working with others to meet the needs of our community

Launched with the Ecumenical Partnership in July 2005 this was an uncompromising agenda for action and outreach with prayer and God's direction at its heart. And as previously observed the Regen Project was a critical element that would facilitate delivery of it. Thus, notwithstanding work carried out in the meantime, including the year and a half in temporary accommodation, it was not until the end of 2012 that the complete package of facilities was available to support personal energy in pursuance of the Christchurch Vision.

With new resources available and the desire that the new buildings be used by the widest range of community activities, the appointment of a Hall Hire Secretary was complemented in 2013 by that of a Children and Family Co-ordinator. Focussed on all ages and stages of Christian development throughout Clevedon Christchurch was continuing the evangelical traditions of both Christ Church and Linden Road based on a hub at a modern building with up to date technology, catering and systems and with an unequivocal statement of purpose to guide the total church membership towards growth.

Christian and non-faith groups (e.g. North Somerset Council, Clevedon Civic Society) have used the meeting rooms and the larger church space has been deployed extensively with for example Christmas Tree Festivals (upwards of 40 Christmas trees), ceilidhs and barn dances, and sessions sorting and packing clothing for charities and toddler groups. Church services were now focussed on Sunday mornings. Morning worship with children's groups were weekly events with, additionally, once per month FACT (Families and Children Together) services for young families and especially those new to faith who may have encountered church through the twice weekly toddler groups.

Less formal evening programmes offered greater depth of worship and bible study for more mature Christians and special group formats, such as The Fridge (upwards of 70 children) and Encounter (20+ young people), were offered to teenage groups. A Shorter Morning Worship was held on Wednesday's at 9.00 am. Needless to say there were myriad other church based activities and events throughout the week.

Freedom to vary the style and layout of chair configurations and the fact that all church service information, including song words and Bible readings, were projected onto the two large screens on either side of the chancel enhanced the modern approach to the services themselves and was very much in tune with the emergent digital age.

So was the use of the beverage kitchen in the church itself to offer hot and cold drinks, with latterly, the creation of a coffee café format at the rear of the church nave.

Of course, the key question is whether or not all this endeavour is proving to be successful as progress towards achievement of the Vision. Though it must be the case that the Vision can never be “completed” and there is always more to do to bring folk to a deeper trust in Christ, but there are some metrics which reinforce the belief that the direction of travel is correct and encourage the Ministers, Russ Herbert and Clive Jennings, that their leadership is taking church members in the right direction. Such metrics must include the average numbers attending weekly church (152 adults and 48 children in 2015) and, because it involves schools and special services, the total attendance in December (1108 adults and 2863 children in 2014). Couple the latter with the fact that Russ and Clive, with Kate Dommett, the Children and Families Co-ordinator, visit and deliver to the main schools in the town teaching, assemblies and support then it becomes clearer that there is a strategic and structured approach to drawing to the church those young people so desperately missing from many church families across the UK.

Our wider reach continued to thrive down the years through our links in supporting two charities in Uganda. A team of dedicated and committed members of Christchurch and other Churches visit and actively support the ministry and on many occasions, it has been wonderful to welcome their leaders here.



## **A brief update from 2016 to 2020 by Revd Clive Jennings and Revd Dr Russell Herbert.**

In 2016 we were joined by a youth worker who complimented the team and together with others built on the existing growth and reach to young people across the town and especially into Clevedon school.

Our links with a national Charity 'Transforming lives for Good' created significant opportunities to support primary school children, staff, parents and carers by coaching children who were in need of additional support. This ministry grew and thrived with a total of twenty-two coaches now supporting children in our local schools. Kate Dommett who headed up this ministry went on to join the national team full time.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2018 Christchurch became a Benefice in its own right. The uniqueness of the Ecumenical Partnership brought greater freedom to serving the wider community and although never restrained by the old structure of the United Benefice there had been a realisation for many years that the Lord was doing a 'new thing' that had emerged since the Ecumenical Partnership was birthed.

The official dissolving of the old United Benefice and the new Benefice of Christchurch and the presentation of licences was marked not by a formal service full of pomp and ceremony but over a cup of coffee with the Archdeacon in the kitchen! How refreshingly different and very Christchurch!

The outward missional Vision and focus of Christchurch remains as fresh today as the day it was given in 2005.

The links with Trinity Theological College Bristol had always been strong with many Clergy and curates having trained there and in recent years a context hub was created where ordinands in training spend anything from one to three years within the Church alongside their training at College. In addition, Revd Russell Herbert also engages in lecturing and we see this as a significant outreach within our Ecumenical setting.

Along with many other outreach and innovative 'Spirit led' ideas Christchurch remained well placed and resourced to share the Gospel in many ways for people of 'all ages and stages'.

At the time of writing this in late 2020 the Country is gripped by the Coronavirus pandemic and places of Worship were required to close for many months. The Church responded by moving its worship 'online' and with thanks to the technical knowledge and creativity of James Covey Crump and the ingenuity of those contributing to the weekly services we continued to reach a large congregation.

We remain extremely thankful for all of God's people who serve the Lord and His community through the life and ministry of Christchurch and our thankfulness to the Saints who have served here and in Linden Road Methodist Church before us.

The Church in this country will continue to face many challenges yet in our history Christchurch has encountered many seasons and in the last fifteen years has encountered a season of renewal and a new freedom within our Ecumenical partnership serving the community as one, as God intended.

We look forward with hope and faith, always seeking to join in wherever the Spirit is at work.

*'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'* 2 Corinthians 3:17

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“Adapt or die” might be the crucial phrase though, sadly it is not one adopted as widely as is needed if Christianity in the UK is to avoid become a marginal faith for the few. Fortunately, with the evidence of the last 15 years in particular and its determined and Spirit led leadership, Christchurch looks set to remain at the forefront of those who are alert to what is required to meet the challenges of the next stages of its evolution.