



## **A Vision for the Church of England in the 2020s**

**'Christ centred and Jesus shaped.  
Simpler, humbler, bolder'**

A commentary to accompany the picture

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Start at the centre. Not immediately with the words themselves but with the image that you're looking at.

What do you see? It could be several things. It could be the centre of a target that we are aiming at. It could be the hub of a wheel which will turn, bringing the movement of the Spirit into the life of the Church. It could be a pebble dropped into the centre of a lake whose ripples flow out bringing refreshment and disturbance in equal measure. But however you see it, and different interpretations are encouraged, what you are looking at is the heart of the vision that we believe God is giving us.



We are not saying anything new: How could we? The vision for what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ doesn't change. It's not something we make up in each generation. It's something we proclaim afresh. But there are also times in our life, and the great challenge facing the world because of COVID-19 is one such time, when God recalls us to a central vocation which is to be a people who are centred on Christ.

This is the heart of the vision: to be a Christ centred church. And it flows directly from those words of Paul to the Church in Corinth: that if we are in Christ, there is a new creation. Things change because Christ changes us. It is his Church, not ours. It is his ministry not ours. It is Christ's ministry in all of us and in a thousand different expression of church and all the parishes that make up the Church of England.

Therefore, there needs to be a strong call to the renewal of our life in Christ: a renewal of prayer and worship; a biblical and theological renewal where we grow in intimacy with God, and overflow with the love of Christ, and are able to give reasons for the hope that is in us. Our first priority is to be a people of prayer, rooted in the revelation of God's love for us in Jesus Christ, the one who died for us and rose again and who pours his Spirit into our hearts for our renewal and for the renewal of the earth. This revelation is given to us in the Scriptures that we cherish. It is lived out in the life and traditions of our church, not least as Anglicans through our liturgy and through a commitment to be the presence of Christ in every community in this land.

Then alongside the phrase 'Christ centred' you see the phrase 'Jesus shaped.' We make no distinction between 'Christ' and 'Jesus'. The two phrases are simply a shorter way of saying we are called to be *Jesus Christ centred* and *Jesus Christ shaped*.

Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, fully God and the one through whom we have access to God. It is in Jesus Christ, and therefore in the Trinitarian life of God, that we root ourselves. We also know the Son of God as Jesus Christ, Mary's son, the preacher and healer from Nazareth, who is still the same Jesus Christ, the one we read about in scripture, the man who shared our life on Earth, lived a life like ours, taught and healed and showed us what our humanity could be, who died upon the cross for our salvation and whom God raised to life.

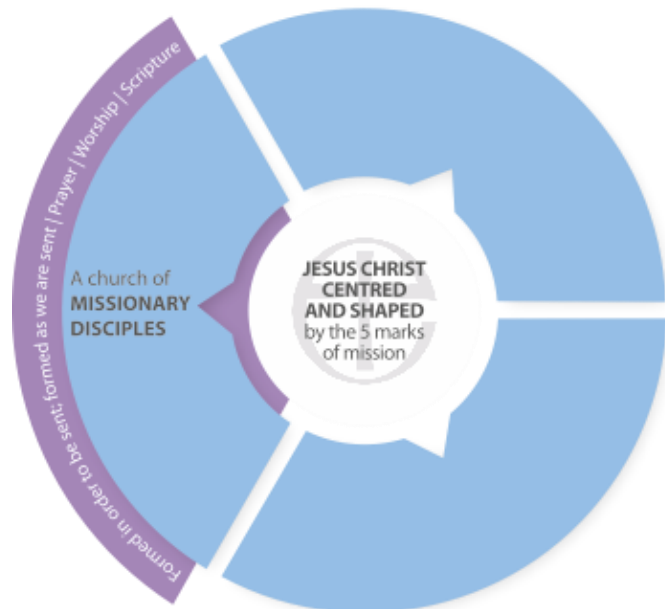
In many provinces of the Anglican Communion this phrase, 'Jesus shaped', is used to describe the Christian life as a life shaped by the five marks of mission. They don't just see these as marks of the mission of the church but as *marks of discipleship*, that is to see our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ as being shaped by the five marks of mission – a Jesus shaped life.

Therefore, this vision is simply and fundamentally about recalling the Church of England to its primary vocation to be **Christ centred** and **Jesus shaped**, which means Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped.

From this centre, particular strategic priorities begin to emerge. They form the three segments of the next ring that flows from the central vision.

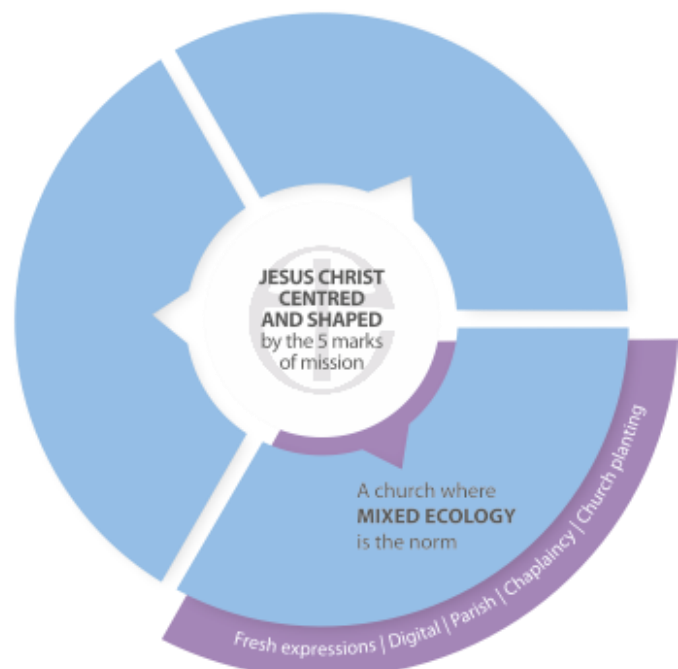
The first is this, we believe that God might be calling us to be much more **a church of missionary disciples**.

We are an apostolic church. God calls every one of us to be a missionary disciple. In the New Testament the same twelve who are named disciples are also called apostles. There is no point when they graduate from one to the other. They are always those who *gather around Jesus* and follow him. And they are always those who are *sent out* by him. It must be the same with us. We are called to gather around Jesus in worship, prayer and fellowship. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are sent out by Jesus to be his witnesses and ambassadors in the world, drawing explicitly on the five marks of mission as the five marks of Christian discipleship.



The next segment says that we believe God might be calling us to be **a church where mixed ecology is the norm**.

The Church of Jesus Christ has always been a mixed ecology. Every church was planted once. By using this phrase, we simply acknowledge what is, but also signal the fact that in the diverse smorgasbord of the different cultures and contexts which we serve in England today we will probably need a greater and more diverse expression of church life. Hence the proliferation of mission initiatives, church plants, fresh expressions, new religious communities, and this year the remarkable new communities of faith that have been established on-line. All this is a sign of how the Holy Spirit has been leading the Church of England in recent years, noting that the most vibrant and creative new expressions of church life nearly always arise out of healthy flourishing parish ministry. There is therefore no conflict between parish ministry and becoming a more mixed ecology church.



However, we also acknowledge that the parish system we have inherited was itself the consequence of missionary endeavour by a church that was formed and ministered in very different ways, as it happens mostly monastic. Therefore, alongside the flourishing of parish ministry, and recognising in these constrained financial times the challenges of sustaining this, we will see God raise up new forms

of church, and particularly new forms of ministry and community life – in fact it is already happening. This includes chaplaincy, an area of ministry that is often neglected in our thinking. It also means developing our online presence and ministry. This has been one of the biggest developments of 2020 and will form a vital part of the mixed ecology church of the future.

The third segment is that we believe God is calling us to be a **younger and more diverse church**, a church that serves children and young people and involves them in its leadership and ministry; a church where black lives matter; an enabling church for disabled people; and a church that reflects the great biblical vision where every tribe and tongue and people and nation are gathered together and our ministry looks like the communities it serves. Diversity of age and colour and ethnicity is never for us simply a matter of inclusion: it is a biblical imperative, and it is the means whereby we will be best able to evangelise our nation and find the very best ways forward for all voices to be heard.



Much work is happening in these areas already, particularly through our schools and chaplaincies and in other initiatives. Though with the recent formation of the Archbishops Task Force on race we shamefully recognise our failure to root out racism in the church, recognise our bias or face the issues of prevalent whiteness. This can change. By clearly making it a priority we believe that in this next decade we can become a more diverse church and better serve this nation. We know there are areas of diversity within our broad church on human sexuality and identity and with the publication of *Living in Love and Faith* we now enter into a period of reflective learning as we are challenged afresh to honour each other and see Christ in each other.

The final circle, neither a vision statement nor a strategic priority, re-states the reality of what it means to be the Church of England; any vision and strategy is only as good as the good it does in shaping the visions and strategy of the local church. This is what matters: the thousands of parishes, chaplaincies, church schools, church plants, religious communities, fresh expressions and mission initiatives, messy churches, food banks and refugee ministries.

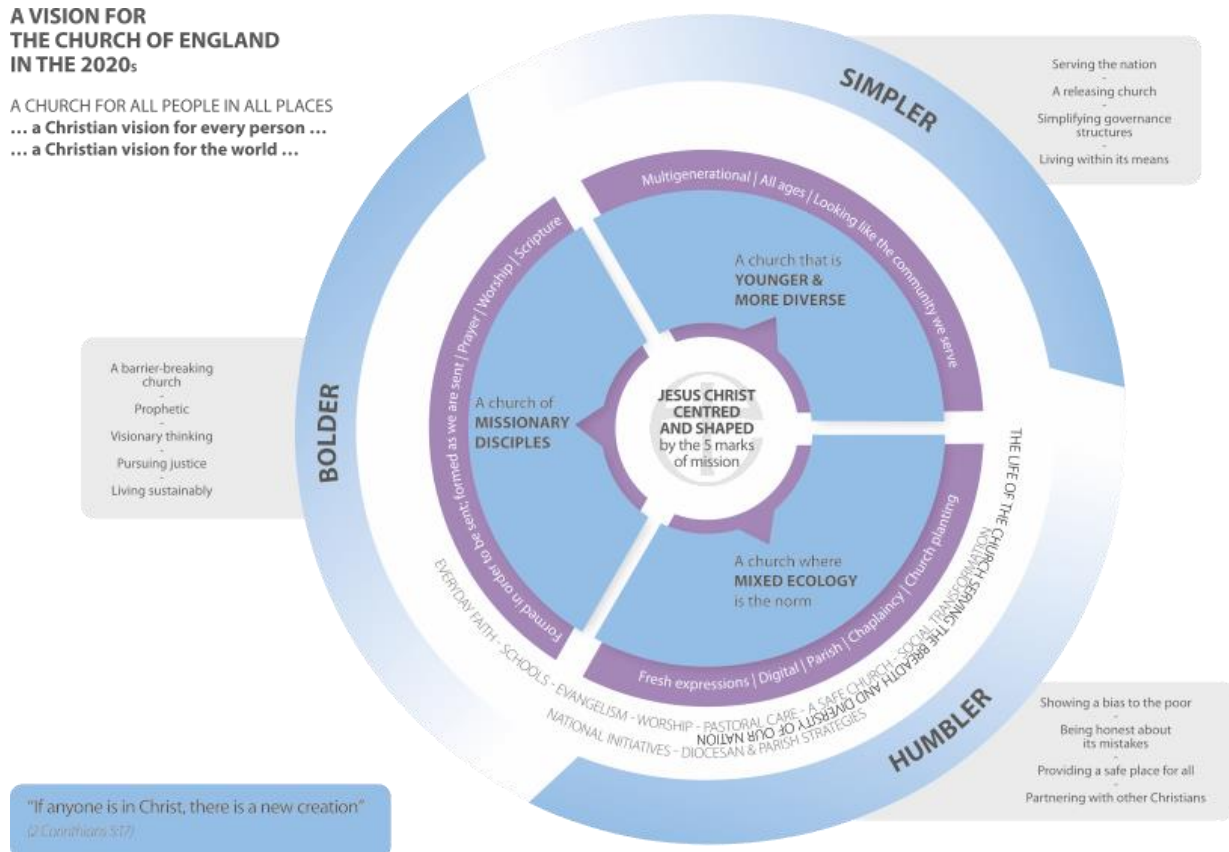


This is the Church of England in all its glorious ‘every inch of the map covered’ diversity. Our hope is that this vision and these three strategic priorities will creatively inter-act with and provoke the dioceses and local churches of the Church of England to renew its life in Christ. By growing congregations of missionary disciples that are younger and more diverse, we will better serve the breadth and diversity of our nation by becoming the church of the networks of 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as its neighbourhoods.

Finally, around the outside you will find three words that have emerged in our discussions and our prayers: **simpler, humbler, bolder**. These three words are not strategic aims, they are virtues that we believe God is calling from us at this particular point in our history. They run through our vision and shape all we do and all that we are.

### A VISION FOR THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE 2020s

A CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE IN ALL PLACES  
 ... a Christian vision for every person ...  
 ... a Christian vision for the world ...



**Simpler**, because we are not as big a church as we used to be, and there might be too much bureaucracy, and the work of the simplification agenda has been an important feature of our synodical life in recent years. As other groups in the church look at our governance structure and other areas of our life, this simplicity must shine through.

**Humbler**, because we are having face our failures, and this isn't easy. The IICSA report has held up a very shaming mirror to the Church of England and we must with great haste move this agenda forwards and become a safe church. We also need to recognise that we are not the only Christian show in town. We need to work with our other denominations, and where appropriate with other faiths and with all people of good will. We must learn to live within our means.

**Bolder**, because the love of Christ compels us. We have a gospel to proclaim and we live and minister in a world of much pain and confusion. The things that have been entrusted to us in Christ are the very things the world needs, showing people the beauty and the purposes of Christ and building his kingdom in the world. Our determination to be carbon neutral by 2030 could be the first of a number of prophetic gestures we make to the world, showing the world that with God all things are possible, and that, in Christ, God has a vision for every person and a vision for the world.

The Church of England is called to be **the church for all people in all places**. We believe that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. This is how things change. It happens when we are in Christ. It is this desire for us to be Christ centred and Jesus shaped which is the simple message we believe God is calling us to bear to the Church; then through the Church to change the world.

Stephen Cottrell  
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