

## **WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR? Vision and Purpose for St. Luke's Maidstone.**

*(An explanation and expansion of the Vision Statement,  
with words from that in CAPITALS to make it easier to follow, by Rev. Chris Key)*

For over a century St. Luke's Maidstone has sought to connect to the people of its area (and often beyond that) in order to offer them the love and salvation that they can receive through Jesus Christ as they choose to follow him. This was expressed long ago in the name given to our magazine, regularly delivered to the whole parish: **Connect**. This wasn't a theoretical aim but the offer of a genuine and warm connection with God, and also with others, available to people of any age or background through Jesus, in the form of a welcoming community, this church.

Our Vision Statement, which takes up exactly these themes, isn't intended to be about our particular values as a community, and still less about our buildings or organisational structures, but about what we believe God is up to through this particular group of Christians in Maidstone: **what we're here for**. It's expressing the 'DNA' of St. Luke's. It has been created following a Sunday when all members were invited to contribute thoughts and prayer, reflecting those contributions, and has now been agreed by our PCC as a good expression of our vision together.

Fundamentally, **St. Luke's continues to be about CONNECTING EVERYONE — CONNECTING** with people, and helping connect those people (and ourselves) more fully **TO JESUS AND ONE ANOTHER**.

We've tried to express that in a simple, memorable way, with the hope and prayer that it will excite and unite us with a passion to fulfil this vision together in the years to come.

This 'strap line' heading is then explored in four distinct "dimensions", **UP OUT IN ON**, which I will explain below, with each having a simple phrase describing it, followed by a little more detail.

*(It's actually designed so that some may remember only the headline, others adding the dimensions, some including the brief phrases, and a few the greater detail; it's useful for everyone!)*

But our heading first insists that we're all about the risen JESUS: we're a COMMUNITY OF FAITH in him, which then enables us to become increasingly connected to ONE ANOTHER as well as to him, in a vibrant family. And it affirms that we're in this together as a COMMUNITY, undertaking all this by involving all those who are willing rather than only a few leaders.

For those reasons we are, and need to be, a WELCOMING COMMUNITY, both to those who are already members and to EVERYONE who approaches us, no matter what their age, race, class, ability, godliness, or whatever.

That's what we're here for, our basic aim as a church, but we inject also a note of genuine humility: we are SEEKING TO CONNECT in these ways. This acknowledges both that we have a way to go, and also that we don't always get it right! The Statement is of our desire, even though we fall short, and will be something we return to regularly, to assess exactly how well we're doing and to seek ways to fulfil it better. We have never been perfect, which is probably why each one of us finds it a place where we fit!

So what does this CONNECTING look like in practice? How could we describe it and perhaps assess the value of our many activities in its light?

Our answer is in the four Dimensions: **UP, OUT, IN, ON**, as we seek to **CONNECT** in all 4 ways.

## **UP**

Our delight is in the kindness of God which has allowed us to discover him and which in turn means we can offer that connection to others (1Peter 2:10). We are nothing without the **UP** relationship to God, and we make this more specific by describing him as **THE LIVING GOD** (with whom we can have a warm friendship, and who acts in today's world) and **THE GOD OF THE BIBLE** (whose character and ways are described in this particular book from him, which is our source of inspiration and authority).

The BIBLE leads us to trust in the one God who is in three Persons, FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT (the Trinity), who we respond to with **AMAZEMENT AND WONDER**. We're awed by who he is, and astonished that he should want to include us in his love despite our failure to live as he desires. Such responses lead to us seeking lives filled with a rich variety of **PRAYER** (connecting to him and asking his help) **AND WORSHIP** (expressing our love for him and offering our lives for his purposes), and to these things being at the very heart of every gathering of his people here (1Peter 2:9).

Furthermore, our church is anything but an exclusive club for a particular sort of person, but is for **EVERYONE** who God has **CREATED TO ENJOY HIS LOVE**, for all humanity! And so we delight in welcoming others also to experience him in our **PRAYER AND WORSHIP** because the Father's **LOVE IS UNCONDITIONAL**, offered to every individual (no matter what their past history) and ensuring that we can have confidence even in drawing near such a holy God, who is so rich in mercy and whose grace can heal us and begin wonderfully restoring our lives.

## **OUT**

We're reminded here that this connection with God is not for us to keep to ourselves but must be shared with others at every opportunity. This **SHARING OUT** of the **GOOD NEWS** is part of who we are together — that Jesus has died for everyone, and his resurrection offers new life with God for ever. But it's more than going **OUT** and sharing **NEWS**; it's the sharing of the character of God, expressed through us (with his help) in **LOVE AND POWER**, which will mean a real respect for each individual, and concern for their welfare, as well as an expectation that God will work miraculously in their lives with healing, freedom and blessing.

So all that we've received from him we seek to pass on, with a humble desire to **SERVE AND ENRICH PEOPLE**, regardless of how they respond to the message about Jesus. And this will include not only a caring for individuals but also a concern to influence **ORGANISATIONS**, from local clubs to multi-national companies and governments, as well as our **ENVIRONMENT** (for which Christians are responsible to its Creator). We want each of these to experience the blessing of God through each of us, as we have opportunity, with the hope that **SALVATION THROUGH JESUS** will be received in this life (and readying them, with us, for the "new heaven and earth" of eternity, Revelation 21:1).

Through individual members as well as our corporate activity, St. Luke's reaches **OUT BOTH LOCALLY AND BEYOND** because we're called not only to love the Lord but also our neighbours (Luke 10:27). This will mean a prayerful and practical concern for those in our parish, our town, our nation, and even our world, and although we cannot change everything we're glad to be involved in work, alongside the Holy Spirit, to bless **LOCALLY** as well as **BEYOND**, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)!

## **IN**

The whole community needs to **CONNECT IN** to give each member support as we **CONNECT UP AND OUT**, so we aim to be **A SUPPORTIVE FAMILY HERE**, where **ALL AGES** feel loved, whether new among us or long-established. So we joyfully include and value all, and this ministry of **CONNECTING IN** isn't down to a few (though some are commissioned for such ministry, including Ministry Team, Youth and Children's Leaders, and Lifegroup Leaders), but requires each one of us assisting those in need as well as being ready to receive help ourselves.

We expect to be a GROWING FAMILY, joyfully welcoming people new to faith (or exploring it), new to the area, or youngsters new to current families. This expresses our faith that the Lord will graciously add to our numbers, enabling us to attract new people as we build his kingdom together.

We explicitly WELCOME ALL AGES AND BACKGROUNDS, including those, for example, who have had an ungodly history (which can receive gentle forgiveness and healing), those with physical, mental or learning struggles, and those of other nationalities or cultures. Such people must be allowed a valued place among us, including their being able to influence everything we do together. And of course we're pleased to provide opportunities and support for younger members too, with each age-group having something to offer all the rest. This FAMILY will involve many FRIENDSHIPS, even across the generations, in ways we'd like to be SAFE AND HONEST — where we can be confident to share any of our struggles or BROKENNESS, knowing we will receive HEALING grace from God and kindness from one another.

All this will help us face the challenge of FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING JESUS, for this is the calling of every Christian: to become like him in character, lifestyle, and obedience to God's ways, following his direction in all things.

## **ON**

is about our vision that EVERY MEMBER will have personal DEVELOPMENT **ON** through involvement here, in their closeness to God and in discerning their ABILITIES to be used for his purposes, as we ready ourselves for ruling in eternity. A helpful translation of Genesis 1:28 tells us that all humans are created “*to partner actively with God in taking the world somewhere,*” so we are committed to enabling GROWTH in CONFIDENCE and in our SPIRITUAL LIVES for everyone, so we each know where we're best of use to him as he ENABLES US BY HIS SPIRIT. That's an exciting calling, to which we can give all our natural abilities, resources, energy and supernatural gifts, in order that his KINGDOM TRANSFORMS the various places where we work, live, relate, rest, and so on, as well as all our church activities. JESUS, RISEN from the dead, goes WHEREVER WE GO, and will TRANSFORM things as we learn to let him loose (Luke 10:8-9).

We'll seek to “*equip the saints [that's us!] for the work of ministry [that's both in church and outside it!]*” (Ephesians 4:12), by giving members opportunities of service within church life, to help discern their gifts, and so they can be made ready for their role on the mission field, both LOCALLY AND BEYOND. This will require us to trust one another, as individuals have a go at something, being always supportive as everyone DEVELOPS AND GROWS together.

### **That's what St Luke's Maidstone is about!**

Hopefully a lot more of what we're doing makes sense to you as you see the purpose behind it more clearly, but you'll also notice ways in which we're falling short of our vision.

In a few Sundays we'll begin asking what needs to change to help us achieve the best we can, so everyone will then have a chance to contribute ideas, and your PCC and other leaders already have a number of thoughts and plans. You're invited to discuss and pray about all this over the next period of time, with friends or within Lifegroups (perhaps spending a few minutes one week on UP, then moving to OUT, etc.), and leaders would love to hear from you about it at any time.

But above all we are praying and expecting that Almighty God will work in us and through us to build his church and extend his kingdom. Praise the Lord!

*Chris Key, June 2019.*