

Rector's Blog - 6th August 2026

TOGETHER WITH COMMUNITY



This is the second of three blogs exploring the Mission Statement *Growing in Christ, Together with Community, Sharing God's love*.

This should inform all that we do. A minor tweak has converted it into three 3-word statements. And removing the words “working” and “the” it expands the meaning slightly from “working together with the community” to something that works on several levels.

That is what I would like to explore here.

A Christian writer in the early 2000s (I don't remember who – Yancey, Ortberg etc) wrote about church circles. Specifically, that there are three circles we can observe. The first, inner circle, is the group of friends and acquaintances that we naturally graduate towards on a Sunday morning. Often in a sociable church these can become closed groups – emotionally and physically. That means that without meaning to we can huddle and close off so that no one else can get into this circle. They are our community and it's easy to stand shoulder to shoulder (or sit chair to chair) not realising we are closed off.

First law of community is always leaving a space or an empty chair. If someone joins, get another one.

The second circle is wider and includes visitors, those on the margins of church life (e.g. hall hirers and their customers etc), groups that we work with occasionally. This circle can feel excluded unintentionally or can be out of sight because of the way in which our comfort zone is with those we know well and see regularly. They form part of our church community and offer the closest opportunity to partner and communicate, to connect and to serve. Also, the easiest to invite in. Second law of community is to look outside of our inner circle, see the opportunities to engage those around us.

The third circle is everyone else outside the first two! In a parish context that is the rest of Sanderstead. One of the strengths of the Church of England is the parish system. We are churches for a defined geographical area with a parish boundary. I, as Rector, have “cure of souls” for all 15,000 people that was passed to me by the Bishop – who has “cure of souls” of all of South London and East Surrey!! That means that we are the parish churches for everyone who lives in the Ecclesial Parish of Sanderstead. Whether they come here or not!

“Cure of souls” means having some responsibility for pointing these people towards their need of salvation and the means of receiving it – by faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. I will expand on that definition some more next week when exploring *Sharing God’s love...*

This third circle means engaging with those we don’t already have links with, those who don’t already come into our path via church services or activities in the halls. This might be engaging individuals or through organisations and businesses and groups.

Third law of community is that we look beyond the church building, looking for opportunities to engage.

The wording change is important to get a perspective on what community engagement means.

Layer one: If we as a church seek to *Grow in Christ*, we are seeking to go deeper in our faith, to know him more, to serve him more and to seek the more of God that is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Discipleship (see last week’s blog on this). *Grow in Christ Together with Community* (comma removed) infers that we want everyone in our community to have the same and to grow with us. It points to the E word – Evangelism – sharing the Good News of Christ crucified, risen and coming again to usher in a new creation of perfection. It is a highly spiritual mission, to save souls and bring as many into the kingdom of God as possible.

Layer two: is to engage with and support and work with everyone we can (resources being limited) as we are called and being a community organisation that supports individuals and others in our community. Sanderstead Neighbourhood Care, Uniformed Groups, Schools, Residents Association, Rotary, other Churches are just some examples of working with other community groups to support community and hopefully to advance Kingdom aims in our area.

But here is a question. Is it biblical? Why engage community at all? The picture is mixed.

The early church was quite distinct from those around them. They looked after the believers. Jesus said, *“love one another so that others will see that you are my disciples”* (John 13:34). The injunction wasn’t to go out and provide for non-Christians, but to live a life of harmony that was so counter cultural that others would want to find out more!

As persecution and oppression increased in later centuries believers would become even more insular and even go underground for fear of imprisonment or worse.

But over the years, the principles of service and justice have grown, and the Church has been fundamental in serving alms – the parish church was the main source of welfare for the poor – education - by setting up schools, health - by setting up hospitals and being a centre of community life. The location of churches, especially ones as old as All Saints, was because that's where people of the time lived!

The voluntary work of churches throughout the land is legend. The National Churches Trust estimated the total social value of churches in the UK in 2021 and the figure was £55bn!

The imperatives to provide for widow, orphan and alien come from the Mosaic and Levitical code in the Old Testament. Jesus invoked the need to support those without a coat, a meal, a drink, a friend or needed healing (Matthew 25) and identified that the neighbour is not just our inner circle but may be those “not like us” (Luke 10). The seventy-two were sent out into villages to heal the sick and to proclaim the kingdom of God is near (Luke 10).

We engage our community, to support, to bring light, to be part of, not separate from that community, to build relationships, to make partnerships and ultimately to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

One phrase that has arisen from these *Wait and listen* prayer gatherings recently is this – “*Christ at the centre of Sanderstead*”. The sense is that this does not mean getting people into our buildings. It means going out and ***meeting Jesus where he is already doing work in people's lives.***

*Together
With
Community*

Our communities here at All Saints and St Antony's.

And the wider community within Sanderstead Parish boundary.

Both / and.

All for his glory.
Amen.

Your brother in Christ,
Doug

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