

King Charles the Martyr, Tunbridge Wells

Discussion Paper

A 'Green Paper' considering
the Church of King Charles the Martyr
its character, role, and future direction

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Introduction

Having been with you now for 2 years I feel that this is a good time to engage in a process of reflection together about our church, King Charles the Martyr. I want to share some of my thinking with you, and also to prompt some discussion. King Charles the Martyr is a wonderful church, with many remarkable people and I feel very fortunate to be the Vicar. I much look forward to the coming years. My feeling is that a discussion about our self-understanding as a community of faith, called by God, to minister to his people in our area would be a very useful undertaking. What values and qualities do we hold most dear? Where have we come from and how have we been changing? What sort of church do we believe God wants us to be? Where do we see ourselves going in the next 5 years? To begin a reflection together on these questions is the purpose of this discussion document or 'green paper', as the government sometimes calls writings like this!

There are a few points it is perhaps worth explaining before going any further. Firstly, the style of the exercise is rather personal, and I am presenting my own thoughts as a starting point. There are several reasons for this, and one of them is certainly not that I think I know best and want to tell people how things are going to be! During the period between my predecessor the Revd Malcolm Hancock's departure and my arrival, all members of King Charles the Martyr were invited to participate in a shared review of the church called "Growing Healthy Churches". This was sponsored by the Diocese and turned out to be a very helpful exercise, particularly in terms of my getting to understand the parish. Some specific initiatives followed from "Growing Healthy Churches" – the re-founding of the youth-group, the new website, a revitalized strategy for welcoming new people, are three examples. For this present exercise though, having the information gained from Growing Healthy Churches to hand, and knowing that there is such a thing as 'consultation-fatigue', I wanted to take a different approach. I also know from personal experience that it is sometimes quite helpful to have something already thought out and given one as a discussion starter, with which one can agree or disagree, as opposed to being handed a completely blank sheet of paper and asked to come up with something-out-of-nothing. Finally, I do have some ideas I simply want to share, and to see what people make of them.

Having said though that this document is somewhat personal in nature, various drafts have been looked at and discussed by the PCC (the church's elected Council), and modifications and improvements have been made as a result of their comments and ideas. Please understand that this document remains a discussion paper, and contains no 'official' policies or proposals, as such. It is more like 'thinking on the way'.

The other main thing to explain at this point is that this document is meant to be primarily reflective and theoretical in nature, rather than attempting to set out a specific programme for development, or a set of proposals for the immediate future. It is not that these other things don't matter—they do, and we will come to them in due course! But there is a lot of experience that shows that for any organisation to grow and flourish, a cycle of action and reflection is needed: one thinks, one acts, one assesses the effectiveness of these actions and thinks again, one acts again, and so on... This document is mainly concerned with the reflection part of this process – with

'doing the theology', you might say. It is sometimes tempting to focus mainly on the 'action' part of the cycle, and to feel that one is 'doing things', particularly when the prevailing climate appears to be a not entirely comfortable one. But having a clear understanding of where we are, who we are, and where we want to be going will enable us, in due course, to do things that promote our vision for the future far more effectively. The more we share this understanding, the more coherent our actions will be. And as Christians we would also want to say that listening to God and trying to discern his will for us is vital if we are to be true to our calling as a community of faith. In this sense this 'Green Paper' follows on naturally from 'Growing Healthy Churches', as we learn from the initiatives that came from it, and consider more deeply the vision for the future that your responses in that exercise began to describe. So this document is primarily theological and reflective in nature. The main idea is that the 'doing' will follow on, after this stage of 'thinking'.

I feel I also ought to allay any fears that this might be the thin end of radical wedge of change, or that I have a particular hidden agenda to 'drop' on King Charles. Some of my ideas will naturally come through in what follows, but I personally think that an 'evolutionary' approach to church development is usually the right one, and that if the will of a congregation is not genuinely behind a particular idea, or that a sufficient consensus about God's will is lacking, then there is little chance of change being successful. This doesn't mean, though, that God might not have radical plans for us! Let us find out.

How are you a part of this process of reflection? The final section of the document will explain how you can express your views, and what will happen next.

In terms of the structure of what follows, first there will be an assessment of where we might consider we are, both in terms of our own past and those around us. Then will follow some thinking about the values and qualities that are most important to us, and to which we feel it is our distinctive calling to witness, as one part of Christ's Church (with a capital 'C') in Tunbridge Wells. The penultimate section will turn to the future, and make some suggestions about the key issues and questions that we need to consider in developing our vision for the next five years. Finally, as noted above, there will be an invitation for you to respond, and some information about what will follow on from this Green Paper.

Thank you for reading it, and for your prayerful consideration of the thoughts contained within these pages.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. J. A.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Where are we?

If we don't know where we are, how can we know the next steps we should be taking? It seems helpful to consider our situation, both in terms of our historic position and role in Tunbridge Wells, in terms of our recent history, and in terms of the other churches around us. What follows is not an exhaustive description, but it does I hope cover the essential aspects.

We are blessed with a very fine history of our church by John Fuller, which gives a full description of how significant King Charles the Martyr has been in the development of the town. Tunbridge Wells has quite literally grown up around us. Our church has always been a fixture within the town, and as one of its most remarkable buildings – certainly on the inside – has always been in the public eye. Significantly, King Charles the Martyr only became a Parish Church, with the responsibilities to a particular locality that that brings, at a relatively late stage in its history. One aspect of this is that the geographical parish is small, and in recent times a significant part of the congregation (currently the majority) come from other parishes. Another consequence of the historical nature of the church is that whilst Tunbridge Wells has no single 'civic' church, King Charles has some affinity with this particular ministry, and belongs very much to the 'fabric' of the town. There is a sense in which the church has thought of itself in 'establishment' terms and has sought to develop good relationships with other local bodies. A significant number of the congregation have served in civic offices.

A further aspect of the interesting history and beauty of the church is that it has a heritage role within the town. Its architectural qualities mean that it is included in lists of places to see in Kent and Sussex, and the church does have a variable stream of visitors at all parts of the year. A very dedicated team of 'church watchers' welcomes visitors and explains the history of the church, six days a week. There are regularly visitors to the Sunday services as well. The beauty of the architecture and the historical interest will have doubtless acted as an encouragement for some people to worship at the church (and conversely for others to seek other churches), and has certainly influenced the style of worship that has developed. A strong musical tradition is part of this (architecture has been described as 'frozen music'), as is the relatively 'formal' style of liturgy. It is natural that the beautiful aesthetic of the church has been mirrored in an appreciation for the beauty of the language of the Book of Common Prayer, and it still is the case that a high proportion of our services use this prayerbook.

The strongly historical aspect of King Charles could mean that more recent trends in Anglican thinking and Church life have had limited influence, but this has not been the case. In recent years the ASB and its successor, Common Worship, have been (generally!) happily adopted and the Parish Communion, which draws the largest regular congregation, uses Common Worship. A monthly Family Service, which although using a 'formalised' liturgy of sorts is informal in style, is well supported across all age ranges. The age range of the congregation is encouragingly broad, with adults of all ages and younger families attending, and a viable Junior Church and Youth Group. The congregation has certainly not let stewardship of the building, a rightly important task, deflect it from other important aspects of a full and developed Christian life. There is a genuinely warm and friendly community feel to the congregation, commented

on to me by several recent visitors on Sundays, and in part this is expressed by the other regular church events and meetings that take place: for example the Fellowship; various prayer and study groups; regular social events. The social events that have taken place have revealed to me how much King Charles the Martyr people enjoying being together and sharing each other's company. There are genuine bonds of care and affection, which, for example, reveal themselves in lift-giving, visiting when people are sick, and expressing support when members are facing challenges in the lives.

The social make-up of King Charles the Martyr is, unsurprisingly, typical of Tunbridge Wells as a whole. Most, though not all members, have (or have had) professional careers and there is a general expectation that doing things well matters. The congregation is very well educated, and it is striking that many members are (or have been) involved in teaching or other forms of education provision. One of the outcomes of this is that members of the church generally have a commitment to learning about the Christian faith, and to thinking about how faith in God interacts with wider issues of the day. Members want to understand more fully the Bible and other resources within the Christian tradition, and to be able to relate what they learn here to the everyday realities of life. In the past commitment to the Tunbridge Wells School of Theology has been significant, and more recently regular study groups have been popular with some members. People appreciate a good standard of preaching. There is also a desire amongst some members of the church to nourish and deepen their spiritual lives, and to find other contexts for praying together outside of the regular services. Two monthly prayer groups are one expression of this, as is support for the occasional Quiet Days that have taken place. Perhaps a further aspect of the interest in practical Christianity and the way faith affects life is the social concern that the Church has, and its regular support for local, national and international charities. Members can be very generous in their support for those whose fortunes are far less favourable than their own: the long-term commitment to the Church Urban Fund is a good example of this. I have also been impressed by how many people, particularly amongst those who are retired, work for other charitable causes in their spare time. Perhaps, rather characteristically, people are often quiet about this!

Regarding issues of change and development, there is a genuine desire to seek the right balance between maintaining and cherishing the riches of the Anglican tradition and finding forms of worship and church life that are helpful for those who are younger, or newer to Christian faith. It is well understood that for King Charles to flourish in the future, new ideas and adaptation are important, whilst remaining true to the spirit and ethos of the church. The responses that people made in the Growing Healthy Churches indicated a desire to see more younger people and families come to the church, and an awareness that good integration between the different ages groups mattered. How change is effected is naturally very important to people at the church, and in particular the reassurance that all points of view can be fairly expressed and properly considered. I have found that levels of trust have been high, and so far no issues have been allowed to become divisive.

It seems to me that an essential aspect of understanding our present situation is to understand how we relate to the other churches of Tunbridge Wells, and particularly the Anglican churches. Tunbridge Wells, for its size, has a large number of churches, and certainly more Anglican churches than one might expect, given its population.

What is striking is that the majority of Anglican churches stand in the evangelical or 'low church' tradition. There is one 'anglo-catholic' church. If we think of ourselves as 'central' or 'traditionally Anglican' or even 'liberal catholic' (to use various phrases that are sometimes applied to churches of our kind), then there are only two churches of a similar churchmanship, St Luke's and St Paul's Rusthall (though Rusthall is on one extremity of the town and is in many ways a distinct community). This has several implications. Firstly it means that because there are other local styles of Anglican worship available to Tunbridge Wells people, we don't need to feel that we have a duty to cater for all tastes, as is often the case for rural churches, or churches in smaller towns – people have choice. We can focus more fully on our own tradition. Secondly, because our church style is relatively unique in Tunbridge Wells, we can expect and hope for people to be attracted to us precisely because of what we stand for, and because we are different. This should inform our strategic thinking, and we should be using our distinct character to good advantage. We have a clear place within the 'ecology' of Tunbridge Wells Church life.

I believe 'central' is probably the most helpful label to use if we are to describe ourselves in relation to other styles of Anglicanism. What this means will hopefully come out more fully in the following section that focuses on values and qualities. But a few brief statements to qualify the description 'central' might include the following.

- We seek to include elements from both the protestant and catholic traditions within Anglicanism in more or less equal balance. So, for example, in our principal act of worship, the 10am Parish Communion, we place equal emphasis on the Liturgy of the Word (the readings, sermon and prayers) and the Liturgy of the Sacrament (the eucharistic prayer and the receiving of communion). Preaching is generally biblically based and takes the readings set for a Sunday seriously—but also seeks out and draws on 'truth' wherever it may be found. We also use servers and vestments, and appreciate liturgical symbolism.
- We value a sense of order and structure in our worship, and use both principal service books of our Church (the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship) in a straightforward way. But we also like a sense of 'relaxed formality' where there is scope for spontaneity, and where the 'spirit' matters more than the 'letter'. Our music is generally traditional, with organ and choir. But we are more than happy to use more contemporary musical styles, when it suits us.
- We have an open attitude to any who want to join us, and are willing to accept people on their own terms. We do not require people to have one particular theological outlook (or indeed any theological outlook, if this is not where they are in their journey of faith)—except, perhaps, a willingness to be open to each other. We see 'believing' and 'belonging' as fundamentally interconnected, and do not necessarily see one as prior to the other. We also understand and accept that people will want to belong to our church community at different levels of commitment.

- We see diversity as potentially a good thing, and are comfortable with the fact that among ourselves we can hold differing views on matters. We can be honest with each other when we differ.
- We value learning and intelligent thinking, and we seek ways to connect our Christian believing with the culture around us and the issues of the day. We are 'liberal' in the original sense of that word: we are open to seek God's truth wherever that may be found. But we do not necessarily believe that we are free to believe whatever we like.

Perhaps, finally, the last point to note in this consideration of where we stand in relation to the other churches around us, is that we are keen on fostering ecumenical relationships with other denominations. This is most obvious in terms of our nearest neighbours, Vale Royal Methodist Church. At times this includes other churches too.

What are our distinctive values and qualities?

If one had to put in a nutshell what sort of church King Charles the Martyr is and hopes to be, what sort of words would come to mind? Of course, many of the qualities and values we would hope apply to us would be things that any (and, one would hope, every) church would want to be able to claim it cared about: faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ; commitment to deepening the discipleship of its members; readiness to share the Christian faith with others; concern to care for each other; a desire to be prayerful etc. To a large extent I am taking all these things as givens in this section because all churches agree on them and see them as fundamental, even if we are aware we need always to seek to improve in them. But what I am interested in here is what makes our church distinctive – what are the qualities that make us choose to belong to it, rather than any of the other churches we could go to locally? What follows are some of my thoughts on this matter. They are in large part indicative or descriptive, and capture, I hope, the important aspects of what we are currently like. But they will also have an aspirational element, in that they set out something of an ideal picture of what we might hope to be like if everything was perfect! I have deliberately tried to use ordinary language to do this, rather than lots of theological or technical words.

The first characteristic that I believe is very significant for us is that we seek to be **inclusive, open and accepting of people**. Every church would want to say it is 'welcoming', and we certainly would too! But it seems to me that the way in which one is welcoming is very significant. In my own journey of faith I have belonged to several churches (and a Christian Union at university) that were genuinely very welcoming. In fact they went out of their way to get to know me and to encourage me to become involved. I quickly realised, though, that having come through the door, to really belong to this Christian community I had to accept certain viewpoints about the Christian faith (for example on the inerrancy of the Bible) and about Christian living (for example on the moral status of homosexual people). There was essentially only one way of properly being a Christian, and it was a rather 'defined' way at that. Because I could not accept fully that particular approach to Christian faith and life, I

found ultimately it was not possible to remain a member of that Christian community. It wasn't that I was encouraged to leave, or anything else like that. It was more that it was impossible for that style of church to cope with someone who didn't necessarily see everything in the 'party' way. Somehow I always remained on the 'outside'.

I believe King Charles is, and wants to be, a church where people are welcomed and accepted wherever they are. There should be no implicit 'requirement' about what one should think and believe in order to be a member. One can belong on one's own terms, and one does not have to 'sign up' to a 'party line' before one is fully included. This doesn't mean, of course, that as a church we are not interested in 'truth' or discerning God's will. We certainly are, and our commitment to teaching, learning and studying the Bible (see below) are a part of this. But we are aware that God gives himself to different people in different ways, and that faith changes over time as one acquires experiences in life, and this—coupled with our dislike of being too ready to rush to judgment about people—means that we are committed to an approach to the Christian faith that doesn't seek to be 'controlling' of others. We hope to provide a context in which people can meet and engage with God, and we also hope to provide encouragement and helpful guidance, but ultimately we leave the nature of the encounter up to God himself. Personally I believe more and more in a non-coercive style of Christianity that, whilst clear and confident about its core beliefs and values, does not seek to pressurize people. In a way this is the complete opposite of fanaticism—it is precisely because we are clear and confident in our faith and beliefs that we do not feel the need to force them on others. We trust others will see something of them for themselves in us, and thereby be attracted to discover more.

In practical terms I think this desire to be inclusive and accepting should mean that it is easy to belong at King Charles the Martyr, wherever one feels one is on one's journey of faith. Where some churches may give the impression that one really ought to have a firm and full faith that one can talk eloquently about, and an 'activist' commitment to church membership, we understand that faith is an 'organic' thing that has 'seasons' and at times may even feel very difficult to hold on to at all. Or faith may feel very new and experimental and perhaps an individual needs time to work it out and let it develop. Or perhaps someone is not sure if they really do believe, but wants to be associated with a sympathetic community whilst they seek greater clarity. I believe it is very important that we should be genuinely inclusive towards people in all these situations. Quentin Letts in a recent article in the Sunday Telegraph wrote a thoughtful and candid description of why he is an Anglican: "I go along every week primarily because I love singing hymns. There's little to beat a good blast of *Praise my Soul* or the Cathedral Psalter setting of the *Te Deum* before lunch. I suppose I go because I love the Book of Common Prayer, which the churches in our part of Herefordshire still use, and because I want Cranmer's cadences to drip into my children's minds. This is partly a cultural thing, partly aesthetic. Religion is there, too, in the background, but I would not dare to claim to understand or believe fully in every part of the liturgy..." I would like KCM to be the sort of church that Quentin Letts, and anyone like him, would feel comfortable belonging to.

The second characteristic I have in mind that is important to us is covered by the word **traditional**. I was rather trying to think of another word here because 'traditional' can often have the connotations of 'being old-fashioned', feeling 'uncomfortable' with

the present world and being somewhat inflexible to change. But I could not think of a better word, and the word 'traditional' certainly need not imply these things at all. Sometimes the word has very positive associations (like when used to describe pubs!) Literally 'traditional' comes from the Latin word meaning 'to hand over' (as also the word 'trade' does), and the idea is that our traditions are the things that are handed to us from the past to help us in the present. In a sense, traditions save us energy and time because they prevent us from having to re-invent the wheel over and over again. Instead we draw on the wisdom from the past, and thereby are better prepared to meet the challenges and demands of the present. In Anglican theology, tradition (i.e. the experience and wisdom of Christians gathered through the ages) is one of the legs of a three-legged stool – the other two legs are scripture (i.e. the Bible) and reason (i.e. intelligent thinking and enquiry). When all three things, scripture, reason and tradition, are balanced together then we believe we are most likely to be making good theology for the present and future, and we can be most confident that we are 'hearing' God as he tries to lead us forward.

So by saying that King Charles the Martyr is traditional I am suggesting that we greatly value the knowledge, wisdom and creative forms (i.e. music, liturgy etc) that are part of the Anglican tradition and we seek to draw strength from them where they can help us in the present. We want to use our historic resources well, and feel ourselves in direct continuity with the generations of faithful who have gone before us. This may mean that we don't always feel the need to jump immediately on the latest 'bright idea' about how the church can be 'relevant' in the present (though sometimes we might!), or that we totally need to re-invent ourselves to be meaningful in our current culture. We believe the riches of our tradition can still be potent in the present, and that we are most likely to come across well to others if we are being true to ourselves and to these things. Attempting to be 'relevant' in new ways needs some care and thought if one also wants to be taken seriously by the world at large.

In practical terms, aspects of our 'traditional' nature would include our use of the formal (and increasingly flexible) liturgies of the church, our use of classical liturgical music and choral singing, the structure and pattern of our services and our careful balance of Prayerbook and modern liturgies, our commitment to observing fully the regular festivals and other significant days in the Church's calendar (e.g. Remembrance Sunday, Ascension Day, Harvest, All Souls), the layout and use of the space within our church building, our sensitivity towards—and ease with—the historical nature of the building itself, and our interest in our history as a community of faith and a parish. A further aspect of our 'traditional' nature is the idea of familiarity. We have a consistent and regular pattern of services, always at the same time each week, and following the same pattern month by month, which means people who might visit us occasionally or who come less frequently know what to expect.

Of course, all this raises the question of who we hope to be attractive to beyond our immediate membership, and a reasonable question to ask is how helpful our being 'traditional' is to those who have no church background at all. Mightn't it even be unhelpful? This is I am sure the case for some people, and possibly many people – and our style of worship might be meaningless (though I hope not alienating) for them. I take this question seriously, but I am not overly anxious about the answer to it. There are several reasons why. Firstly there are many churches locally that specialize

in presenting Christianity to the genuinely unchurched and have some expertise in this. It is not a case of being 'us-or-nothing' and, as discussed above, I believe we have a particular role to play in the Tunbridge Wells Church ecology. Secondly, many people who presently do not come to church actually do have some church background from the past and have some notion of what 'traditional' Anglicanism is. This can often be from their childhood and family background, or from past church membership that stopped because of a change in life circumstances, or (I shudder to mention it) a fall out with the Vicar! I quite often get comments from people as they leave after funeral services or wedding services that suggests that they are genuinely grateful for, and have appreciated, the service and that it has resonated with them and effected them in some meaningful way. Sometimes they even express relief that it has been a service that they feel has in some way been familiar and they have understood. I occasionally get the feeling they are surprised that they have not felt uncomfortable being there! It seems to me that 'traditional' still has a lot going for it with these sorts of people. In part I see our role as being there precisely for them, even if they don't come to church regularly, or indeed might never be regular members. We must reach out to those who are 'sympathetic' to the Anglican Church and who live lives that they would describe as being based on Christian principles and values without alienating them. And thirdly, there are also some people who become Christians at churches who put a strong emphasis on evangelism and proselytism, who as their faith grows and develops discover they need to belong to a different style of Christian community with (possibly) different theological emphases. Jacqui, my wife, would be someone who has followed this path. My feeling is that a church that takes seriously the riches and resources of the Christian tradition, and has a strong commitment to thinking and education (see below) might well have much to offer to these people. If the second category of people mentioned above (those with some earlier church experience) might naturally decrease in coming years, then I have a feeling this last category is likely to increase.

The third characteristic that I believe significantly defines us is that we are **committed to thinking and learning**. To return to my three-legged Anglican stool as mentioned above, this characteristic relates to the other two legs: scripture and reason. In some senses this counterbalances, and works in creative tension with, our traditional character. If being concerned about tradition means that we value the wisdom of the past, being committed to thinking and learning means that we are equally interested in, and excited by, the present and the future, and realise that we live in an ever-changing world that will give us new opportunities and place fresh challenges before us. Understanding our faith and the world around us more deeply will enable us to relate the timeless truth of the Gospel to the particular experiences of men and women today more effectively and helpfully. I have always felt rather unsure about forms of Christianity that seem to require people to leave 'normal' reality behind and enter into a 'alternative' and somewhat detached or constructed 'Christian reality' where life is in some critical way different in kind, and certain experiences and questions have no place. Sometimes a particular religious way of speaking—a sort of 'code'—features prominently. To me it feels like there is a danger that this can be an attempt precisely to avoid the hard questions and experiences that are inevitably a part of human life. If Christian faith is to have any meaning or credibility then surely it must take us deeper into reality and not away from it. This is why the thinking and the learning are so important, and why the intellectual underpinnings of our faith should

matter to us.

Our interest in Christian education accordingly has several aspects. Firstly we see preaching as important, and we believe it should be knowledge and experience based, rather than opinion based and assertional. We want to understand the Bible better and be fully open to the richness and depth of meaning of the texts that are at the heart of our Sunday worship. The Bible is a powerful and life-changing resource and we want to do more than simply read in to it the things we are already familiar and comfortable with. We want to be shaped by it, and not it by us. Generally we don't see sermons as crude exercises in being told what to think, but as suggestive/educative/challenging reflections where we are encouraged to think further for ourselves and deepen our own understanding. We don't seek to avoid the hard questions. Secondly, we encourage our Christian learning through groups and through the discussion amongst ourselves that they enable. Sometimes the Bible might be the starting point and we relate a particular book or biblical theme to our world in an attempt to make connections (the recent series on Revelation would be an example of this approach). At other times a particular set of issues might provide the subject matter, and we relate these to the Bible and other Christian resources (the Lent study group looking at ethical issues would be an example here). Where possible we are keen to be aware of the most up-to-date thinking in the areas we are studying, and to try and be theologically 'literate'. Additionally, from time to time, we run confirmation groups which also serve as Christian basics courses and are open to anyone who wants a refresher (or to understand for the first time), the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. Thirdly we do from time to time invite people with expertise to come and talk to us. The School of Theology has been a noticeable part of this, although currently (and hopefully temporarily) it is in abeyance. The annual King Charles lecture is another example. Fourthly we appreciate that understanding the world and the way God interacts with it is not purely an intellectual process, but is also a prayerful and 'spiritual' one. The mode of 'listening' to God and trying to discern his influence upon reality and his call to us is important. The Julian prayer group and the Parish Prayer Group are aspects of this, as well as the regular intercessions on Sundays and the Quiet Days at West Malling. I would also suggest that our particular interest in music plays some role here too.

Overall, we do not want to subscribe to a too-simplistic account of Christian believing. We understand that in many ways the world is a complex place and that faith can be a subtle thing. We acknowledge that God is at work outside his Church as well as within it. Accepting and engaging with this is, we believe, not a sign of weakness but of strength.

Our fourth characteristic as a Church rather follows on from the third and is one expression of it: we are and want to be **committed to the world**. We understand that Christianity is as practical as it is theoretical and that faith should lead to works.

I have mentioned above that I am very impressed by the number of people who are involved in a whole range of charitable activities in Tunbridge Wells and beyond. These works are not done in the name of the Church but I believe they reflect a genuine commitment to the Christian gospel of compassion and service. I hope that what happens in church on Sundays does encourage and support people in their charitable

works, and I would certainly want to suggest that those concerned see these activities as direct responses to Christ's call to be a disciple. It would be an interesting exercise at KCM to do a survey of the number of good causes that members have some active link with: I suspect it would run into many tens. In my experiences in different parishes around the country, churches are usually full of people who do a great deal for their communities in a whole host of ways, and it sometimes irks me that the usually relentlessly negative national media never seems to realise this. I think part of this is down to the Gospel's own teaching that one should be modest about one's good efforts and not seek to impress others with them—as God sees all anyway. We also live at a time when it is fashionable to portray the Church as out-of-touch and increasingly irrelevant.

As a church, more directly, we do have a system for financially supporting charities on a monthly basis, and we try to foster deeper links with them, where we can, by inviting speakers to briefly talk to us at services. Within recent times there have also been some more ongoing commitments too – for example the past link with Benwell parish, the Mission to Seafarers and our relationship with the Hospice in the Weald. We have good contacts with the school and nursing home in our parish and there are regular visits. We also frequently make the building available for fundraising purposes and concerts for charities.

To a significant extent I interpret my own pastoral work with those who are not members of the congregation as being part of our collective 'commitment to the world' too. The contact I have with families at the time of a funeral or other moment of tragedy, or with couples who are preparing for marriage, or with parents who want a child baptised at the church, I see as the ministry of KCM as a whole Christian community, expressed through me. I am there as a representative of the Christian goodwill and concern of all of you, and (I trust) of God himself, for those people. This is offered simply as gift, and not out of expectation of any particular returns for us. I have always felt very deeply that the Church should be interested in people in and for themselves (because God is), and not in terms of what they can do for us. In a culture where we are increasingly wooed and manipulated as consumers or targets I think this 'no-strings-attached' care and concern can speak very eloquently of God's grace and love towards people, and in itself can exercise an implicit critique of our materialistic society. Of course, maintaining this approach is not always easy – particularly when people themselves take a low consumerist view to what we want to offer and are manipulative of us ("I want to book your church for my wedding. How much will it cost..."). But I do believe we must try and be as generous of spirit as we can be, even whilst we should seek to be wise. Sometimes there are opportunities to talk deeply about spiritual things with people who ordinarily would probably steer well clear of churches. I find this particularly so at times when someone has died.

The final characteristic I want to mention here (and bearing in mind that this is not an exhaustive list of the qualities that we should have as a church, but rather of those that are distinctive of us and on which we place special emphasis) is that we seek to be **incarnational**. I know I said at the start of this section that I wanted to avoid using theological words, but will you allow me just this one as there is no single easy non-theological alternative? By 'incarnational' I mean that we want to 'embody' or 'demonstrate' the qualities that Jesus bore witness to and spoke of when he talked of

the Kingdom. We want to try and 'model' collectively what the kingdom might mean, given that it is concerned with the transformation of this present world, as well as with the perfect world that (we believe) is to come. Obviously the whole section above on commitment to the world is directly relevant here and could have been included under this heading. But I have separated this section off for clarity's sake. Essentially here I have in mind the idea that the way we relate to each other, and the quality of our community life and care and concern for each other, is not a secondary aspect of the Christian message that we try to bear witness to, but a primary one. The way we do things is as important as what we do. Or, to put that in other words, the medium very much is part of the message. We reveal the Christian Gospel as much through our being and living together, as we do through our verbal proclamation. We try and show people why Christianity is good news as well as telling them.

I see the social events and other gatherings that we have beyond our services as key examples of our desire to be incarnational. On occasions like a Harvest Supper, or a Barn Dance, or indeed the monthly breakfasts before the Family Service, there can be the lovely feeling of members of the church of all ages really enjoying each other's company and being together. The friendship and care shown at the monthly Fellowship is also another example of this. The pastoral care and support that members of the congregation show to each other, and the extent to which we are willing to go out of our way for each other, is a further aspect. At a slightly different level, the way we make decisions—at the Parochial Church Council, or wherever—or deal with differences or conflicting needs, is also very relevant here. We hope to live with a feeling of trust and mutuality, rather than suspicion or divisiveness. We try and make it easy for newer members to become fully integrated into our life and structures of responsibility. We try and treat each other well. Of course, I am not suggesting perfection has been achieved here and we must be honest about the extent to which we fall short: this is aspirational stuff! But I think we know these things matter greatly, and we self-consciously want to nurture and promote them. And we do this in the hope that others will notice these qualities in us as a church, and want to become a part of it themselves too.

At a time when people in our society are subjected to an ever increasing conflict of ideologies and belief systems, and find themselves increasingly isolated from their neighbours, I believe attempting to model the qualities of Christ's kingdom as a caring and welcoming community of faith, is still a very viable and powerful way of approaching our future, and our Christian mission.

And so, **to summarise** this part of the discussion paper: At King Charles the Martyr we provide an open door to Christians wherever they are in their journey of faith. People should find our method of worship familiar, and whilst it is based on traditional values and wisdom we are equally committed to relating the Gospel to the ever-changing world we live in. As well as seeking to deepen Christian knowledge and understanding the Church and its members are actively involved in the Tunbridge Wells community. This is seen as a practical demonstration of our Christian outlook and the care and concern we show towards each other, and towards our neighbours. At the heart of our outlook there is a feeling of trust and mutuality. This is reflected in the tremendous friendship and bond that grows among our members and the way we approach everything we do. We do this in the hope that others will recognise these

qualities and will also want to become part of King Charles the Martyr.

The next five years?

If we were able to look into the future and have a glimpse of King Charles the Martyr Church in 2010, what might we hope to see? I guess the following picture might be the sort of thing: a lively, welcoming, open, warm, faithful, caring, thoughtful, questioning and learning, theologically intelligent, confident, outward-looking, varied community of Christians of all ages with a rich tradition of worship and a concern for the world around us and for being a means for God's activity in our locality. Each of the 5 qualities I have mentioned above can give us ideas for how we can further realise this picture. In some cases it is a matter of doing what we are already doing and seeking to do it as well as possible – ensuring the quality of our sermons and music is as good as we can make it, for example. In other cases we might well want to do some new things, or adapt and develop some of our present activities – for example concerning how we relate effectively to the locality around us. The specifics of all this should start to emerge from the discussions that follow on from this discussion paper. As I explained at the start, the point of this paper is not (yet) to make a lot of specific proposals. But I do want to make several general suggestions about some of the key areas I believe we should be considering in our thinking about the future. I will do so fairly briefly here:

- We must think about how new people who come and visit us can be welcomed and integrated into our community in the way they wish to be, if they feel that we might be the right church for them.
- We must think about our 'visibility' and how we make ourselves and what we stand for known within Tunbridge Wells as a whole.
- We must think about how we can relate effectively to our locality, including those who live within our geographical parish boundaries and the Pantiles shopping area.
- We must think about how we can make the best use of our wonderful building: as a symbol of many of the riches of the Anglican tradition; as the home of a living Christian community; as a spiritual resource to visitors and the community at large.
- We must think about how we educate ourselves about our faith and its interaction with our culture and the questions of the world at large.
- We must think about how we can create the context for people to explore and grow in faith, to understand more profoundly the major issues in their lives, and to deepen their response as Christ's disciples and as people of prayer and faithfulness.

- We must think about how we strengthen our fellowship together as a diverse community of all ages.
- We must think about how we demonstrate God's practical commitment to people in their need.
- We must think about how we relate creatively to other churches around about us, particularly Vale Royal Methodist Church.

This might feel like an overwhelming list of things to think about! Indeed there might be other things we want to add to it as we think further about the future. But in none of these areas are we starting from scratch, and we have many fantastic resources, in terms of people and experience, to help us make progress with them. It is because generations of Christians before us have attended to them that we are here at all today. It may well be the case that we live in more challenging times than some of our immediate predecessors, given the way our society and culture is changing, but there is no reason to feel disheartened by this—quite the opposite in fact. We are living at a time when our faith and witness has never been more relevant to the world.

How you can respond to this 'Green Paper' and what happens next

I am most interested to hear what your thoughts are, having read this document, and would welcome your comments and your response. What do you think about the analysis of our past and present, of our distinctive qualities, and of the key questions for us to engage with over the next five years? Please feel free to say what you agree with, disagree with, or feel is missing. If you would like to make a response—and I encourage you to do so—please either email me with what you think (to robert.avery@btinternet.com (don't miss out the dot in the middle of my name!)) putting something like 'KCM Discussion Paper' as the topic, so my email programme doesn't accidentally filter it out as potential spam. Alternatively please feel free to write to me (via the Parish Office, or *King Charles Vicarage, 5d Frant Rd, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 5SB*), or if you prefer, please call me (on *Tunbridge Wells, 525455*). It is always good to hear specific ideas for projects and new initiatives, but what I am most interested in, at this stage, is what you feel about the deeper issues discussed in this paper.

Please respond by **Monday 20th February 2006**. Soon after this date I hope to produce an update, summarising the comments that people have made so you can see what the general feeling about this paper is. At the March meeting of the Parochial Church Council we will then take stock of your responses and start to move from the reflection phase to the action phase. Once this is under way, I will write another update to explain more about our developing plans.

Once again thank you for reading this document, and, in advance, for your response to it.

