

St John the Evangelist
COPTHORNE PARISH CHURCH



VISION 2025-2030

copthornechurch.org

GROWING IN LOVE for God & each other.

St John the Evangelist is part of the Diocese of Chichester and the Church of England. As the parish church in Copthorne, we believe that our core purpose is to be a Christian presence in our local community and to pro-actively playing our part in God's mission, reaching out in sharing God's love to all.

Our mission statement of GROWING IN LOVE for God and each other is rooted two distinct Bible verses from the New Testament. The first one is: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"* (Matthew 22:35-40, NRSVA).

The second one is: *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."* (1 John 4:10-12, NIVUK).

As a church in Copthorne, we are passionate about sharing the Gospel and supporting one another as followers of Jesus Christ. We are also dedicated to helping those in need, raising awareness of injustice, and caring for God's creation, both locally and globally. In everything we do, we pray for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Our mission of growing in love is expressed through five key priorities:

1. *Sharing the GOOD NEWS*
2. *Teaching and NURTURE*
3. *Acts of GENEROSITY*
4. *Speaking up for JUSTICE*
5. *Care for CREATION*

1. Sharing the GOOD NEWS

Sharing the Good News is not just a stand-alone priority; it underpins and connects with all our other mission priorities. At its core, it's about proclaiming the Gospel and reaching out to others by sharing this God's message of love (John 3:16). It forms the foundation for everything we do and is key to growing and strengthening our worshipping community.

The most common way we share the Good News is through our weekly and seasonal church services. These services bring our Christian community together to worship God through prayer, music, scripture, teaching, and the celebration of Holy Communion and Baptism.

Over the past five years, we've explored new and creative ways to connect with the community, including modern worship styles and digital communication. Our services are diverse and welcoming, attracting people from all backgrounds. Recently, we've seen significant growth, particularly through our support for local refugees and asylum seekers, which has helped make our congregation more multicultural. On average, our weekly services draw between 100-130 people, and special services can attract even larger crowds, sometimes doubling that number.

On Sundays, we also offer children's and youth programs during the 11am service, where they explore the Bible, discuss life, and pray together. Our leadership teams plan these sessions to share God's love with young people. Through our partnerships with local schools, we can also share the Good News with pupils, inviting them to seasonal services and bringing Bible stories into school assemblies. Additionally, we regularly engage with local uniformed groups, introducing them to the Christian faith.

In addition to our Sunday services, our church building hosts a variety of outreach activities and community groups throughout the week, including toddler sessions, Alpha courses, language classes, social events, and quiet reflection times. Each of these programmes is designed to reach out to others and share God's message of love in its own unique way.

2. Teaching and NURTURE

Teaching and nurturing followers of Christ is rooted in Jesus' Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, NIV-UK). We believe our calling is to share Jesus' message of hope with others. The process of making disciples naturally happens as newer believers are mentored by more experienced followers. Our focus on teaching and nurturing helps new Christians to experience God's love and receive the power of the Holy Spirit to grow more like Christ.

Over the past five years, we've seen more people come to faith, get baptized, and engage in our prayer gatherings, children's programs, youth groups, music, and Bible studies. Throughout the year, we offer three Alpha

courses (usually one per term), four baptism preparation classes (once per quarter), and two confirmation classes (in spring and autumn). Every spring, we also run a marriage preparation course for couples planning to marry at our church. Recently, we've hosted several bereavement courses, leading to the formation of follow-up support groups. These smaller groups provide a key space for pastoral care, discipleship, friendship, and building meaningful relationships. Our goal is for each group to be large enough to encourage missional activities but small enough to ensure everyone is cared for.

Our church's social media platforms help keep both members and the wider community informed about events, courses, and opportunities to get involved. Our WhatsApp prayer group has become a valued part of church life, providing a space for people, including those who are housebound, to connect and pray together. We also send out a weekly online newsletter to keep everyone up to date with life at St. John's. For those who can't access digital content, we print a hard copy.

We have a dedicated pastoral ministry team that pro-actively is in contact and visits those who are sick or lonely in our parish. They also provide pastoral care before, during, and after church services. Additionally, we offer care at several local community homes, where residents and caregivers can attend services or receive home visits when possible.

3. Acts of *GENEROSITY*

Generosity is at the heart of our growing in love. We believe that God calls us to be generous with what He has given us. Generosity is a sign of trust in God's provision, knowing that there will be enough for everyone to share. We are mindful that giving should come willingly and joyfully, not out of pressure or obligation. As St. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians: *"Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Corinthians 9:7, NRSVA).

To encourage generous financial giving, we've recently promoted the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) for our regular givers. The PGS is a simple and secure way for people to contribute and helps the church receive income more efficiently, reducing the administrative burden on our treasurer, staff, and volunteers. Alongside PGS, we offer several other ways to give, such as cash, card payments, and QR code donations. We also aim to emphasize the importance of generosity and stewardship through sermons and teachings.

Generosity isn't just about money. We also focus on how we can support the work of the church in practical ways, such as volunteering our time. All church members are encouraged to use their gifts of ministry at services - leading, welcoming, serving, reading lessons and leading prayers. As church blessed and grateful to the musicians and singers AV technicians and those providing hospitality, who freely give of their time and expertise at church services. People can also join a social team. Our social events are an essential part of our outreach to the village, providing opportunities to connect with the wider community. We regularly organize events like quizzes, lunches, and dinners, all of which are well-attended. Our weekly Coffee Bar, English language classes and International Café also offer a space for locals and refugees to integrate, learn English, play games or simply enjoy coffee, and build community.

In addition to these local efforts, we remain committed to generous giving to charities and mission organizations beyond our village. We support both local and global causes, including Crawley Open House, The Children's Society, The Royal British Legion, the Church Mission Society (Heather Johnstone's Rehema Project in Tanzania), Tearfund, and Compassion. We also participate in Christian Aid Week, where we distribute envelopes and organize central collection points throughout the village.

4. Speaking up for JUSTICE

The Bible teaches that all people are created in God's image and are of equally value. Christians believe that God is a God of justice, and as His image-bearers, we are called to pursue justice, particularly for the poor, oppressed, and vulnerable in society. Despite knowing what is right, our human history has shown a tragic pattern of injustice towards one another. However, the surprising message of the Gospel is God's response to humanity's legacy of injustice. Although He abhors injustice, God has given us the gift of Christ's life. Jesus lived out righteousness and justice but died for the guilty. Yet, God declared Jesus the Righteous One when He rose from the dead. Now, Jesus offers His life to us, the guilty, so that by trusting in Him, we too can be declared righteous before God. If God declares us righteous even when we don't deserve it, our response should be to pursue justice and righteousness for others.

Our mission to speak up for justice is inspired by the last chapter of the bible book of Proverbs. King Lemuel's mother offers this wisdom: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and*

needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9, NIV-UK). Advocating for justice is not always easy, yet an essential part of our Christian calling. As a church, we will continue to support organizations addressing both global and local injustices. These agencies work to speak out against injustice and build safe communities, protecting people from violence and modern-day slavery.

From the scriptures we also know that we are called to love and welcome the stranger, regardless of their cultural background. Since 2021, our village have been hosting hundreds of refugees and asylumseekers. In the past three years we have been able to speak up on their behalf and at times we have been at the forefront of challenging injustices faced by them. We regularly collaborate with local authorities, our local MP and the Home Office, helping refugees understand their legal rights and access to education and housing. We have discovered that as a church we are incredibly well placed to provide community and care for those who have lost homes and family and are recovering from trauma.

5. Care for CREATION

As Christians, we have a biblical mandate to care for all of God's creation. This responsibility is a core part of our mission and influences how we treat our land, buildings, investments, and other assets. As a church, we want to play our part in protecting and enhancing the diversity and abundance of life in our local area, while also working with others to restore and sustain the health of our planet. We believe that when we adopt a proper relationship with creation, others may be drawn into a deeper, life-giving relationship with our Creator God. We worship a God who loves the earth, He created and calls us to care for it. Caring for creation is an essential part of our worship and witness, as we respond to a creation that is groaning (Romans 8:22).

Our church has always been a place where we celebrate significant life events with joy and gratitude. We take great care in maintaining our properties and churchyard, which is much appreciated by the village. Most of the routine maintenance of the church and churchyard is done by volunteers from the church and the wider village community. In 2019, we received our Bronze Eco Church Award. Eco Church, an initiative that was launched by the charity A Rocha in 2016, has now grown into a community of churches working together to care for God's earth. At the heart of the Eco Church initiative is an online survey that helps churches assess how they are caring for the environment in various areas of church life.

In recent years, we have made several steps toward sustainability, including switching to environmentally responsible utility providers. We've also created a "wildflower meadow" and a small "community orchard" in our churchyard to help nature thrive. Each year, especially during our Harvest Festival, we focus on themes that highlight our commitment to caring for creation. However, we want to do better as we believe there's more we can do in the future. We recognize, along with A Rocha and many other churches, businesses, and organizations, that we are in a climate emergency. In response, we are committed to a process of continuous improvement to meet the highest possible Eco Church standards.

OUR VISION for the next 5 years

1. *Changing church interior (GOOD NEWS)*
2. *Growing pastoral groups (NURTURE)*
3. *Giving to church growth and mission (GENEROSITY)*
4. *Training churches in refugee advocacy (JUSTICE)*
5. *Attaining Gold Eco Church (CREATION)*

1. Changing church interior (GOOD NEWS)

Our mission is to continue sharing the Good News and equipping each other to share our faith to others as well as inviting them to come along. Over the past three years, we've realized that our current worship space no longer meets the needs of our growing church community. We plan to change and redesign the interior of our main building by removing pews, installing new flooring, and adding flexible seating. This open, adaptable space will support current activities and allow for future development. It will provide the flexibility to engage with the community while maintaining a strong sense of worship on Sundays and during special services.

2. Growing pastoral groups (NURTURE)

We are already committed to visiting people in their homes, care homes, and other local venues. Moving forward, we aim to strengthen our connections with local hotels, schools, and youth organizations. Our vision is to have 80% of our regular worshippers, including youth and young adults, actively involved in pastoral groups. These groups will include Bible studies, prayer groups, youth and children's activities, and courses like Alpha, Lent, baptism, confirmation, marriage, and bereavement support. Some groups are already established and led by capable leaders, and we

hope to see more growth in the years ahead, fostering deeper connections and spiritual growth.

3. Giving to church growth and mission (GENEROSITY)

A key priority for the coming years is raising funds for our church interior project. This is essential for the growth of our church and our missional activities. We will focus on effective fundraising efforts, seeking support from private and institutional donors. We also plan to expand our volunteer teams to assist with this and other church initiatives. Additionally, we will continue our commitment to the annual Parish Ministry Costs (the 'parish share').

4. Training churches in refugee advocacy (JUSTICE)

We are committed to supporting both global and local social justice initiatives. Our church has been at the forefront of advocating for refugees and asylum seekers. Looking ahead, we want to enhance our support systems for refugees who have lost their homes and families and are recovering from trauma. We will continue to challenge the injustices faced by refugees and asylum seekers, advocating for them with MPs and other institutions. Furthermore, we aim to train other churches to offer integrated refugee support within their own communities.

5. Attaining Gold Eco Church (CREATION)

Our goal in the coming years is to achieve the Gold Eco Church Award. We will start by integrating creation care into our worship, prayer, and learning. This includes finding energy-efficient ways to manage our buildings, such as installing solar panels and updating our heating system. We will also focus on caring for our churchyard as a vital space for both people and nature. Most importantly, we will engage with local and global communities on caring for creation through sustainable lifestyle choices, both as individuals and as a church, in alignment with our Christian faith.

Our vision is both ambitious and achievable. Above all, we believe it reflects our desire to follow God's heart and express our identity and mission as a local church. Our five mission priorities align with the Five Marks of Mission, which represent a well-recognized Christian commitment to God's holistic mission. For more details on these five marks of mission, visit: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>