



# The church that lives outside in

**TN25a** Training Notes series: Planning

*This piece was written in May 2006 for the Public Pulpit column in the St Albans Observer, and last updated for this website in April 2023. This newspaper (which no longer exists) was designed for movers and shakers in the city (it was not a free paper), and the Pulpit column offered a Christian comment on some matter of the moment that had a local angle to it. The column has since transferred to the Herts Advertiser (which is a free paper) and John continues on the team of writers (see Training Notes TN75, 'Writing for the media'). This piece is copyright © John Truscott. It is provided as an illustration for Training Notes TN25 on John's website, **The radical values that Jesus taught.***

It seems no one can exist without a 'vision statement' these days.

Some are far too safe, others are filed and forgotten. Few are followed with passion, so transforming the organisation.

Christ Church, St Albans has a stated vision to become "an all-age community, on a shared journey of faith, making the edge the centre".

It is the last part of that statement that makes people curious when I quote it, and it certainly sounds odd.

What does it mean?

What it says is that people on the edge of the church are at the centre of its purpose.

It means that what matters most next Sunday is the newcomer rather than the person (like me) who has been around for 30 years (*over 40 years now!*).

It reminds us that the 10-year old from the New Greens Estate who turns up at our Friday evening 'The Shack' event is what we are all about. Or that that event itself is as valid a congregation as our Sunday morning services, though it is certainly not 'church' as most of us would know it.

But this is not normal logic in a world where pecking orders are important and status is fiercely defended.

Yet these words are put in the same kind of language that Jesus Christ used for the Kingdom of God.

He said that when you transfer your life to this Kingdom you have to get used to a completely different set of values from what you find in the world.

For example, if you are first you are last, if you are the greatest you are the least, if you try to save your life you will lose it, and weakness is strength.

Those represent just a selection of Jesus' teaching from St Matthew's Gospel if you want to check them out.

Christians join a Kingdom where some key norms of society are completely rewritten. It is in this context that to have a vision that the edge becomes the centre fits very comfortably.

So if you like the idea of being totally different, of standing out from the crowd, of unlearning a lot of things you take for granted, of moving outside your comfort zones, all you need to do is to join a church!

Except that some churches find this downside-up and outside-in Kingdom rather too uncomfortable. So at Christ Church we make sure we work at it by putting the idea into a key statement and printing it week by week so we cannot ignore it.

Being a Christian is not, first and foremost, about believing a creed or behaving in a certain way, but about following one who challenges the norms of a self-centred world.

So, come on in at the edge, and find yourself at the centre!

*Website note: John enthusiastically supports the Christ Church vision but played no part in its formation. The credit for that belongs to Jeremy Follett, the Vicar of the church, and the Parochial Church Council members at the time of the choice. The statement is given as a 'vision' (ie. a destination to aim for) but the edge/centre phrase is a 'value' as part of that vision and so is used here as an illustration of TN25. When written everyone could assume this was all focused on Jesus Christ so his name was not mentioned. But things are different today and the wording is being reconsidered to make it more explicitly Christian.*

This piece is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN25a and supports Training Notes TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*. For material on the concept of 'vision' see Training Notes TN32, *What do you mean by vision?* For 'purpose', TN48, *Let's get purpose statements right*. For 'values' see TN74, *Understanding values*, and TN142, *Values create a culture*. See also TN124, *What's the point of church?*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his working with you to identify a set of values and then build a vision.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN25a under Planning.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325

Email: [john@john-truscott.co.uk](mailto:john@john-truscott.co.uk)

Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>