

Immanuel Church Highters Heath

Highters Heath Lane, Highters Heath, Birmingham B14 4TB

W: <https://immanuelhightersheath.com>

Parish Profile 2024



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1. Welcome and Introduction

a. Welcome

Welcome to Immanuel Church, Highters Heath, and thank you for prayerfully considering whether God is calling you to serve here. We hope that in the words that follow you will find information and insights to help you to discern whether Immanuel might be the next step in your priestly journey.

We pray that our next incumbent will build on our strengths, support our Local Minister – Ordained, and help build capacity to share the good news with our neighbours.

b. Immanuel's history and location

The *parish* of Highters Heath is on the southern edge of Birmingham and borders Worcestershire. It came into existence in 1938 to provide worship space for the increasing numbers of people moving into the area. The parish currently numbers approximately 10,000 people.

Immanuel *church* was consecrated in 1940. It is built of buff brickwork with a red roman tiled roof and Byzantine influences. It has an integral Lady Chapel and two vestries. There is no graveyard. The church is well-maintained and in good repair. It is a focal point in the locality and regarded with much affection. There is an adjacent church hall and a car park for approximately fifteen vehicles.



Image: Hollywood Primary School Remembrance Service (from west doors of Immanuel)

c. Current Leadership Team



Immanuel is blessed with the ministry of Revd Sandra Langston as local Minister, Ordained. Sandra is a Self-Supporting Minister, and we are very thankful for her ministry amongst us and the time that she is able to offer to us as a worshipping community.

To run the church and support the Local Minister, Immanuel has a committed PCC which meets every two months. Decision-making is democratic. Five experienced members of the PCC, including the Local Minister, Lay Vice Chair and Secretary, form a Steering Committee which meets monthly. Immanuel has had no wardens for several years. The tasks a warden

would carry out are shared between the members of the Steering Committee; this works well and shares the workload. Likewise, Immanuel has no Safeguarding Lead, but the PCC Secretary ensures that administration, policies and practices are in place and understood, and updates the Diocese's Safeguarding Hub.

The PCC has appointed several sub-committees to provide support and leadership: Worship Committee (provides support for the Local Minister in developing and leading services); Eco Church Committee (leads the church's focus on being eco-aware), Narthex Management Committee (leads on the management of the Narthex), Church Hall Committee (leads on the management of the use and maintenance of the Church Hall).

Immanuel has a significant lack of capacity in the leadership team to be present in the community in the way we would like.

2. Vision and Mission

a. Our vision and mission

Our Vision and Mission statements have been prayerfully reviewed over the years, most recently in light of the diocese's Transforming Church initiative with its call to build on our call to love God and our neighbours. These underpin all we do and aspire to.

Worship ... Fellowship ... Outreach

To be a vibrant and compassionate community, deeply rooted in Christ, fervent in prayer, and passionately committed to sharing the transformative power of the Gospel.

Vision Statement, 2024

Immanuel means God with us. To live this, we encourage and nurture all those who seek with us the opportunity to hear and understand the Good News of forgiveness that Jesus brings, through our worship, fellowship, and outreach. Above all, Immanuel is where love for God and love for our neighbour can be found.

Mission Statement, 2024

Throughout its long life, Immanuel has been a church which prays, which celebrates, and which cares for both its congregation and the wider community of Highters Heath. It is a place which captures the hearts of those who attend whether that is with their family for Messy Church, a baptism, wedding, a funeral, for regular services, or for the various community activities which take place there. It is a place known to many as ‘their church’ even if they rarely walk through its doors.

We want to see our church grow, spiritually, numerically, and in frequency and type of use made of the building by the local community. We have a passion to continue to be relevant to our parish in all its diversity.



b. Serving the congregation and the wider community

Developing the under-used Narthex area of the church in 2020-2021 by installing toilets, a kitchen servery, wi-fi, and investing in digital giving was a significant step towards fulfilling our vision. Grant funding and a lot of sacrificial giving made this project a success, with no call on church reserves. This reflects our ambition for Immanuel - to be open and accessible to and for all. The development was blessed by Bishop David (former Bishop of Birmingham) on 26 September 2021.

3. Worship and Liturgy

Regular and faithful worship is at the heart of our church community. We are a dementia-friendly church, open to all, seeking to provide different types and styles of worship to meet the needs of all. Our building lends itself to a variety of arrangements for worship, and we are fortunate in having movable seats rather than pews.

Refreshments are regularly served after Sunday services, and this is a valuable meeting point for all at the start of the week. Our fortnightly newsletter, website, and Facebook page all make information about our services, other activities, and news readily available.

a. Regular Worship Services

Sunday Services

1. Eucharist

10am Sung Eucharist – following Common Worship and Lectionary 1st, 3rd & 4th Sundays. Vestments are worn by clergy. There is a Gospel procession and a robed server. Music is generally, but by no means exclusively, traditional.

8am Said Eucharist – following BCP.
2nd Sunday. Vestments are worn by clergy.

2. All Age Worship (non-Eucharist)

10am - 2nd Sunday

Usually lay led. We have a small music group and more modern music is used.



3. Morning Prayer or Taizé-style Meditation (non-Eucharist)

10 am - 5th Sunday (when it occurs) or
Morning Prayer – following Common Worship

b. Special services, festivals, and traditions



Our festival services tend to follow the Lectionary e.g. Lent, Easter, Holy Week. Some of these services are lay led. We are proud to be a dementia-friendly church.

We occasionally hold other special services such as the ordination as priest of Revd Sandra in March 2022, shown here.

1. Christmas Services

11.30pm – Midnight Mass - Christmas Eve – Common Worship
10am – Sung Eucharist - Christmas Day – Common Worship

2. Christingle Service

Held at 4pm on Christmas Eve, this joyful and very popular service brings families together from around the local community. We draw on the Children’s Society order of service and readings. A team of people from the congregation prepares the Christingles on the day, always wondering if they have prepared enough.



3. Community Carol Service

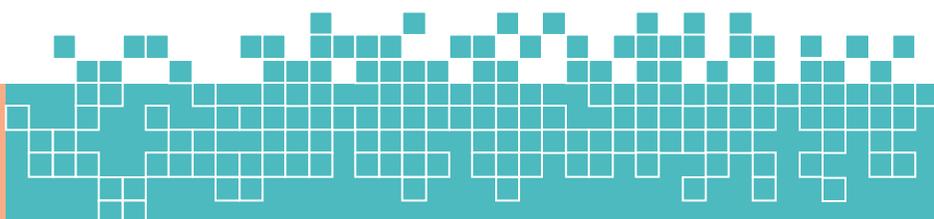
This very successful venture was new in 2023 and looks set to be an annual event. The *Voices Together* community choir plays a significant part in our carol service.

4. Gift Service

Held annually in November/December this service is run in conjunction with the local primary school. People are invited to bring along an unwrapped gift suitable for a child. Birmingham City Mission wraps the gift and delivers it to a child who otherwise would not receive a gift at Christmas.

5. Nativity Sunday

Traditionally an opportunity for Junior Church to perform a version of the Nativity during the communion service on the last Sunday before Christmas, there is now an invitation to Messy Church and Baptism families to create a Nativity from Scratch.





6. Remembrance Day Services

Alongside Immanuel's Remembrance Day Service, there is also a service of Remembrance by the whole of the local primary school (page 3). Pupils and staff assemble outside church on the Friday before Immanuel's service to take part in their own Act of Remembrance. Their artwork and reflections are displayed in church.

7. Remembrance and Memory Tree

During our morning service on All Souls Day we read out the names of loved ones who have died, provided by members of the congregation. In December we hold a popular open morning with a Memory Tree for anyone in the community to come and remember

their loved ones e.g. family and friends of those whose funeral service was held at Immanuel.

8. Other services

We hold an annual Pet Service. We have also explored a Healing Service.

9. Messy Church

We hold three Messy Church events each year regularly drawing in 50+ children and parents/carers from the local primary school, and more widely from the local community. We are fortunate in having a member of the congregation who is a primary teacher and is able to organize appropriate activities, along with a team of helpers from Immanuel.

There is also a messy-style Pancake Party to mark Shrove Tuesday and a Light Party (2023 – Glow in the Dark) to provide an alternative for All Hallows Eve. Events are timed to enable children leaving the local primary school to attend with their parents/carers.



c. Children

We have a Children's Corner for visitors' children, and for use at various services e.g. weddings and baptisms. Children are welcomed; we enjoy their chatter and activity during worship. Currently, we do not have a Junior Church due to lack of young children in the congregation.

d. Music

The Church boasts an excellent two-manual pipe organ that is played every Sunday, also a piano. Our Musical Director, who is a professional musician, has adeptly blended a wide range of musical styles into our services, from traditional to modern. We also have a flautist and a guitarist, who play for All Age Worship, and at other times too.



e. Collect for Immanuel

The following Collect for Immanuel was written by members of the Worship Committee. It is used in most Sunday morning services and is found on a card inside hymn books. It connects us to our Vision and Mission statements and roots us in prayer.

Heavenly Father

We are the family of Immanuel. We thank you for the fellowship, friendship, and love that we share in this Church.

We pray for the whole community of Highters Heath as we seek to serve them both spiritually and practically.

Our door is open, and the table set, for those searching to know the gospel of love and forgiveness that we strive to live.

May we always remember, through days and lifetimes, that you are Immanuel – God with Us. Amen

4. Community Engagement

Immanuel is involved in the local community in a variety of ways e.g.

a. Yardley Wood Food Pantry

Immanuel has supported Yardley Wood Baptist Church's Food Pantry for many years by providing a collecting point and encouraging people to donate food. Our collecting bins are in the Narthex, next to the main entrance, and so are easily accessible to all who enter the church.



b. Immanuel Preschool. This group meets in the church hall five days per week during term time. It has access (by annual agreement) to church land on the north side of the church building, an initiative that was developed in partnership with the preschool, parents, and Immanuel. The preschool is named after Immanuel church but is independent of it.

c. Hollywood Primary School. Pupils make termly visits to church to mark the main Christian festivals. One of the teachers is a member of our congregation and leads our Messy Church. The school choir supports some of our special events. Teachers use the church car park during term time.

d. Grendon Primary School

Our Local Minister makes termly visits to the school and is seeking to develop our relationship with the school.



e. Little Dots

Little Dots is a mobile Play Village for pre-school aged children and their parents/carers. Set up by a local parent and ex-schoolteacher, Little Dots hires the Nave for three mornings per week. Cleared of chairs, and with a sound wooden parquet floor, the nave provides a very suitable and safe space for the Village. Immanuel's Local Minister makes termly visits to their sessions, and each supports the other's activities.

f. Church Hall

The Church Hall is regularly hired out by a variety of community groups and is usually fully booked. Income from hiring has enabled us to maintain the building, with a much-needed replacement kitchen being fitted in August 2024 with the help of a grant from the Lottery Fund. Fundraising enabled us to fit a defibrillator in 2024. The Hall is also used as a voting station for elections, and community meetings e.g. held by the Police, and the local MP.



g. Grendon and Billesley Neighbourhood and Family Centre (GBNFC)

Immanuel supports GBNFC. This Group is made up of three Early Years Provision across the Billesley and Highters Heath Wards of Birmingham and a Children's Centre that provides services relating to Family Support, Parent and Children Groups that support the development of children, across the Selly Oak District.

Hollywood Preschool is part of GBNFC. There are termly visits to the preschool by the Local Minister. Good relationships have been developed and we share and promote one another's activities. The natural areas at the east end of the church building have recently been developed for bug hunting.

h. Uniformed organisations

Immanuel has had a long association with the local Guides, through the work of our Local Minister, Ordained as guide leader. From time-to-time they attend Immanuel for a special occasion.

5. Pastoral Care and Discipleship

a. Supporting and caring for the congregation

There are strong friendships within the congregation. During lockdown a successful telephone tree ensured we maintained contact with one another and ensured we prayed for one another regularly. This prayerful support has continued.

The Local Minister is currently able to take home communion to five of our members who are no longer able to get to church, but due to the current lack of capacity these take place only twice a year.

b. Opportunities for spiritual growth

Alongside the input from services, on Sundays and other days, a range of provision is made for study and/or reflection and worship at key times of the church's year. For example, the Church of England's booklet 'Watch and Pray' was made available to all the congregation for Lent. Likewise, supporting material and activities for Creationtide, Advent, and Ascension to Pentecost (Thy Kingdom Come). Lent Study Groups have been provided either by Immanuel, or by a neighbouring church, with an open invitation to all to take part.

6. Church Life and Activities

A variety of activities are a regular part of church life, for example:

a. Community Choir

Understanding the value of sharing our musical gifts, we initiated *Voices Together*, a community choir project, in March 2023. The choir has grown to over forty members who meet every Tuesday evening during term time at the church. The Choir took part in a Fundraising concert on behalf of Immanuel and a Community Carol Service in 2023 and sang at the Three Counties Show in June 2024. There are plans for Christmas 2024.



b. Eco Church

In 2023 Immanuel set up an Eco Church Committee to explore and lead the church on a journey to become more eco-friendly, both inside the building and outside in the grounds. In 2024 Immanuel achieved the Bronze Eco Award from the A Rocha UK initiative and is now working towards Silver. There is interest in the activities of the committee both among the congregation and in the local community.

c. Coffee, Cake & Chat

Coffee, Cake & Chat takes place once a month on a Friday afternoon. Apart from lots of chatter, a simple quiz or game is played. It is hoped that this might be extended from the elderly and those living alone, to mums with young children. It provides an opportunity for them to get out and meet others in a warm, inviting environment. This initiative started with a dementia-friendly service, Short & Sweet, set up by our curate in 2016; following lockdown, it was not possible to resume.

d. Fairtrade

With the opening of the Narthex, and its facilities for serving refreshments, we re-established Immanuel as a Fairtrade church. Our tea, coffee and sugar are all Fairtrade. The All Age service in September has a Fairtrade focus as part of the national Fairtrade fortnight.

e. Sunday Sales

There is a long history of Sunday Sales after the morning service, usually one every couple of months. A small team of people collect items and organize the sales which raise small but steady revenue for the church. Other small fundraising activities are also arranged by the team.

7. Challenges and Opportunities

Immanuel has achieved a lot and has often risen to a challenge e.g. embarking on a successful fundraising and building project largely during lockdown. Like any organisation, we face some challenges, but we are also very aware of some significant opportunities.

a. Capacity

Challenge. With one part-time Local Minister, Ordained, and an aging leadership team and congregation, Immanuel has a lack of capacity to deliver effectively our vision and mission and meet the pastoral needs of the congregation and wider community.

Opportunity. The desire of the diocese to appoint an incumbent provides a significant opportunity to move forward and be even more effective. Also, there has been a positive response to the events and activities we have carried out to try and develop a sense of community e.g. prayer walks, a Light Party (on All Hallows Eve) and Pancake Parties (on Shrove Tuesday). A Community Fun Day in July (hosted by Immanuel but led and co-ordinated by local people and including a Memory Tree for people to remember children who have been lost) provides a potential new model of addressing the issue of capacity and offering something to the community which we want to explore.



b. Church attendance

Challenge. The congregation has remained stable over recent years with a usual 10am congregation of around 30, an 8am congregation of around four (the electoral roll is 47) and a Messy Church congregation of 50+. While some people have died or moved away, we are encouraged that a few new people have found a worshipping home with us. During lockdowns we moved to online services, and once able to meet in the building again numbers grew back to largely pre-pandemic levels.

The main congregation is predominantly aged 70+, with a significant number aged 80+. As the congregation ages we want to find effective ways of supporting them to age well and identifying their gifts for this stage of their lives. The closure in July 2024 of the only other place of worship and community centre in the parish (Maypole Methodist Church), due to an aging congregation and dwindling numbers, is a stark warning.

Opportunity. We have several families with young or teenage children who attend church occasionally. Currently we are unable to offer anything to the young people themselves, due mainly to the age profile and skill set of the current congregation. We hope to be able to develop a ministry to this demographic across the parish. Due to the closure of Maypole Methodist Church, there may be opportunity here to pick up and develop some of Maypole Methodist Church's activities e.g. Soup & a Roll; also, a few of its congregation might find their way to Immanuel.

c. Pastoral care

Challenge. The congregation is proactive in looking after each other pastorally when it comes to day-to-day matters and keeping the leadership team informed. Immanuel is well-known for being welcoming to all and taking care of people. However, in situations which require a priest, or where a priest is requested, our Local Minister is often hard-pressed to find sufficient time. A lack of capacity means we have not been able to develop an effective pastoral ministry to the three care homes in the parish or reach out to the young people in the parish to help meet their needs.

Opportunity. We hope our new incumbent will be able to share some of the pastoral care needs and help us develop a sustainable approach to it.

d. Finances

Challenge. Immanuel is not an endowed church. Our income comes mainly from giving, hiring the buildings, and occasionally grants for projects, most recently a grant of £16k towards the installation of a new kitchen in the hall. We completed the development of the Narthex without using any church reserves (£55k was raised from grants and personal giving). Two recent essential and unexpected repairs to the church building made a large dent in our reserves. We now have limited reserves to cope with future major expenditure without a loan or appeal e.g. replacing the surface of the car park, or a new boiler, which are on the horizon.

Opportunity. The hiring out of the church building made possible by the installation of kitchen, toilets and wi-fi makes a valuable contribution to our income and helps secure our running costs. We hope to develop this income stream by providing more activities open to the local community, identified as a need by the people themselves. We hope also to make effective use of grant funding to help us deliver our vision.

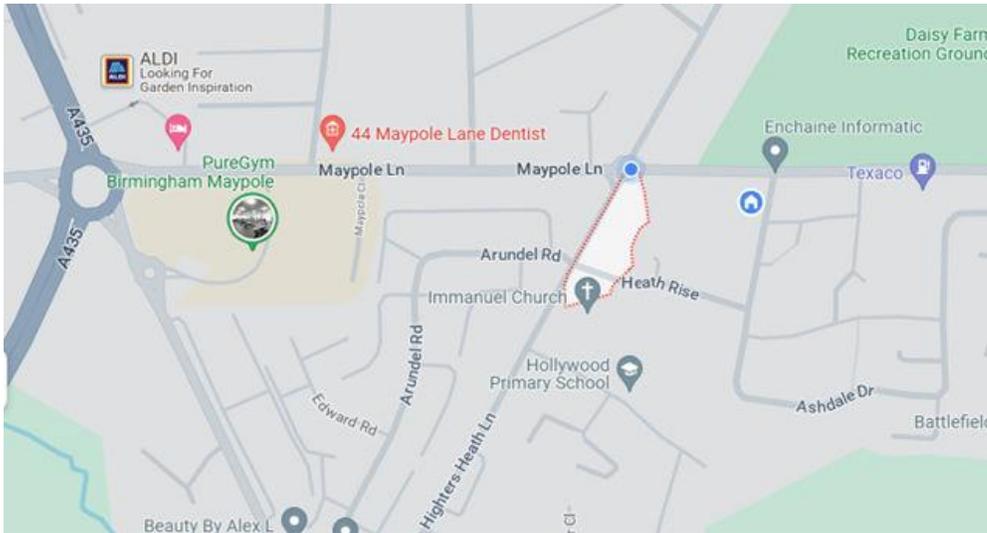
8. Local Context and Demographics

a. Neighbourhood

The parish is cut across by two major roads – Maypole Lane and Highters Heath Lane. This results in two quite different parts of the parish.

To the north of the parish, beyond Maypole Lane and Daisy Farm Park, is the Warstock estate, which borders on Yardley Wood. It consists of dense housing, much of it rented and/or former council housing. There is significant poverty and unemployment. There are quite a few baptisms from this part of the parish. Half of the members of the Electoral Roll live within the parish.

The other side of the parish is more affluent, with rented and owner-occupied housing, and quickly leads out into fields and a rural aspect. Quite a few members of the congregation come from this part of the parish, and beyond e.g. Wythall, Kings Norton and Solihull.



b. Facilities

Immanuel Church is situated in a residential area consisting of a mix of mainly owner-occupied and rental properties, and next to a local community primary school. There is a second primary school and a children’s centre in the parish along with two preschools. The nearest secondary schools (one a new CE school) are close by, but in neighbouring parishes.

Daisy Farm Park, with a children’s play area, is in the parish. There is also a dance school for children and young people. The parish is well-served by several regular bus routes e.g. to Solihull, Kings Norton, and Birmingham city centre, three large supermarkets (Sainsbury’s, Lidl and Aldi), and a few smaller shops and take-aways. There is a doctor’s surgery, a dentist and a funeral director.

c. Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019)

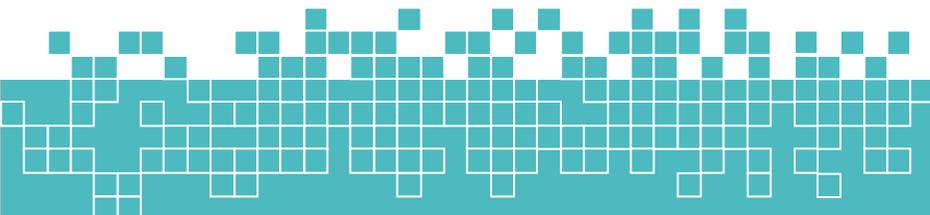
The parish is among the most deprived parishes in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019). It ranks 1,583 out of 12,382, where one (1) is the most deprived parish).

The data indicate the following: child poverty (20.1%), pensioner poverty (19.1%), working age poverty (11.2%), those with no qualifications (30.4%); numbers living in social housing (15.2%), lone parenthood (30.6%), people living alone (27.6%), older population (16%) and ethnic diversity (13.6%).

Some of these figures are likely to have increased due to the social and economic impacts of Covid-19 since the data were collected, or other changes within Birmingham e.g. ethnic diversity has increased.

d. Specific needs or issues

Finding effective ways, and the capacity, to help meet the needs of people in the parish identified in the IMD data (see above) is a priority. We identified a variety of activities and opportunities when fundraising for the development of the Narthex, and since, but have not had the capacity to do as much as we hoped.



1. **Coffee, Cake & Chat** (formerly Short & Sweet) is a dementia-friendly opportunity for people to meet in a safe, welcoming environment. Open to all, this particularly targets the older population (16%), those living alone (27.6%), and pensioner poverty (19.1%). We now need to focus on raising awareness of this opportunity.
2. **Little Dots.** Although a commercial activity, this opportunity for young children and their parents and carers meets a very real need in the community, where lone parenthood is 30.6%. Immanuel's own 'Tots Time' closed several years ago due to lack of capacity. Little Dots helps Immanuel be a focus of support for young children, although we recognize that this is a paid-for activity, and not all have the funds (Tots Time was free).
3. **Messy Church.** We would like to strengthen the pattern of Messy Church by meeting on a more regular basis and providing a simple meal for the families who attend. This would target child poverty (20.1%) and lone parenthood (30.6%).
4. **Soup and a Roll.** Initially our plans were to extend the provision of this activity provided by Maypole Methodist. Now this church is closing, we can consider whether this is something for Immanuel to offer. This would target those living alone (27.6%) and pensioner poverty (19.1%).
5. **Place of Welcome Network.** We have considered joining the Place of Welcome Network and holding a weekly coffee morning during which we can invite support officers to help people overcome issues around child poverty (20.1%), pensioner poverty (19.1%), working age poverty (11.2%), and unemployment. This would be in addition to and complement Coffee, Cake & Chat.
6. **Other initiatives.** We have explored ways in which to build capacity through the body Mind Spirit Partnership (older people), Re-Engage (older people), Urban Estates, The Active Wellbeing Society (healthy lives for all in society), and Presence and Engagement (equipping Christians for a multi-faith world). Each of these needed more capacity than we have available and have stalled.

9. Leadership Expectations

- a. **Immanuel is looking for** an incumbent who shares our vision, and who is committed, self-aware, willing and able to delegate as appropriate, and able to offer some, or all, of the following:

Personal

- **Spiritual depth and commitment.** A strong spiritual foundation, a personal relationship with God and an ability to inspire others in their spiritual journey while continuing to stay informed about theology, pastoral care, and relevant issues.

Leadership

- **Leadership and vision.** A clear sense of direction for the parish, the ability to inspire growth, and lead by example, along with the ability, willingness and communication

skills to work collaboratively with our current leadership team, particularly our Local Minister and PCC.

- **Collaboration and teamwork.** An ability to adapt to changing circumstances while working with various groups (e.g. PCC, volunteers and parishioners), foster a sense of community, encourage teamwork and value everyone's contributions.
- **Administrative competence.** We are looking for an incumbent who is organized, able to manage parish administration, and handle/oversee responsibilities such as finances and governance.

Ministry

- **Preaching and teaching ability.** The ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that are relevant to the contemporary world, inspire faith, and relate Christianity to daily life both within the church and within the local community,
- **Pastoral sensitivity and compassion.** Empathy, compassion, and a genuine concern for people; this is a hallmark of Immanuel.

b. Immanuel's openness to change and growth

Immanuel has always had a heart for outreach and growth. We recognize the importance of our place within the community and have worked to develop this in new and different ways. We have risen to the challenge of being more present in our parish, and the refurbishment of the Narthex, the growth of the Community Choir and our commitment to Eco Church are just some examples of the way in which this has been developed. Of course, there is always work to be done, but we are proud of what has been achieved thus far.

Our current vision prioritises opening the building to the community for a variety of events and activities. Drawing people to our worship services may not be the primary goal of our activities, but we firmly believe that we have something to offer that will bless others, and developing our presence in the community is a key part of our vision and mission for the future.

Immanuel PCC
12 August 2024