

St Marys Ethos

Introduction

- This document provides the Trustees of St Mary's Community Centre (the Centre) with guidance from St Mary's Parochial Church Council (PCC), representing the worshipping congregation of St Mary's Church (the Church).
- This document will not describe strategy or specific projects, but may help Trustees decide how to make business decisions.
- There is a longer version of this document which explains more fully some of the thinking behind the process by which this ethos was devised, probably only of interest for the current or potential Centre Trustees or PCC members.

Other linked documents (eg, 'St Mary's Handbook', 'The License') may describe, at a more practical level, aspects of the Church-Centre relationship such as default Sunday room layout, agreements about maintenance, license agreements etc, but this document describes the principles.

- The ethos of an organisation is its culture. The ethos of St Mary's is set of Christian beliefs which translate into a set of behaviours, which are expressions of what the Church believes.
- This document aims to describe how the beliefs of the Church relate to the activities of the Centre.
- This ethos at the level of the beliefs and behaviours described below should be part of the wallpaper of St Mary's, familiar to staff and volunteers, as well as congregation and PCC, and visible to other users. They may help to shape the spirit and thinking of the organisation.

The Church Urban Fund document *Keeping the Faith* [□](#) says that a Christian Ethos and Values statement

- "Enables a project to be more effective in communicating and retaining its vision, particularly as founding members move on;
- Encourages shared identity and common purpose, which often makes projects more focused and effective;
- Allows trustees and project leaders to confidently and clearly articulate their Christian values without sounding defensive or discriminatory;
- Is crucial if an organisation wants to employ workers with a Christian faith"

Principles and Pressures

About us:

- St Mary's (Bramall Lane) is in a deprived but lively area of inner city Sheffield. The Community Centre was established within the Church building following a major refurbishment in the 1950's, with a second major refurbishment completed in 2001
- St Mary's Church and Centre share an overlapping Vision
- The Community Centre has two trading subsidiaries, St Mary's Conference & Catering and St Mary's Training & Consultancy
- Together these 4 separate legal entities (Church, Centre, Conference & Catering and Training & Consultancy) form the 'family organisation group' known simply as 'St Mary's (Bramall Lane)'.
- The work of the Centre is, in several important senses, the responsibility of St Mary's PCC.

- The Church does not expect the Centre to perform all of its mission on its behalf (eg as expressed within the Five Marks of Mission^[2]) but the Church invests much of its congregational energy into the Centre on the basis that the Centre's work is central to the mission of the Church.

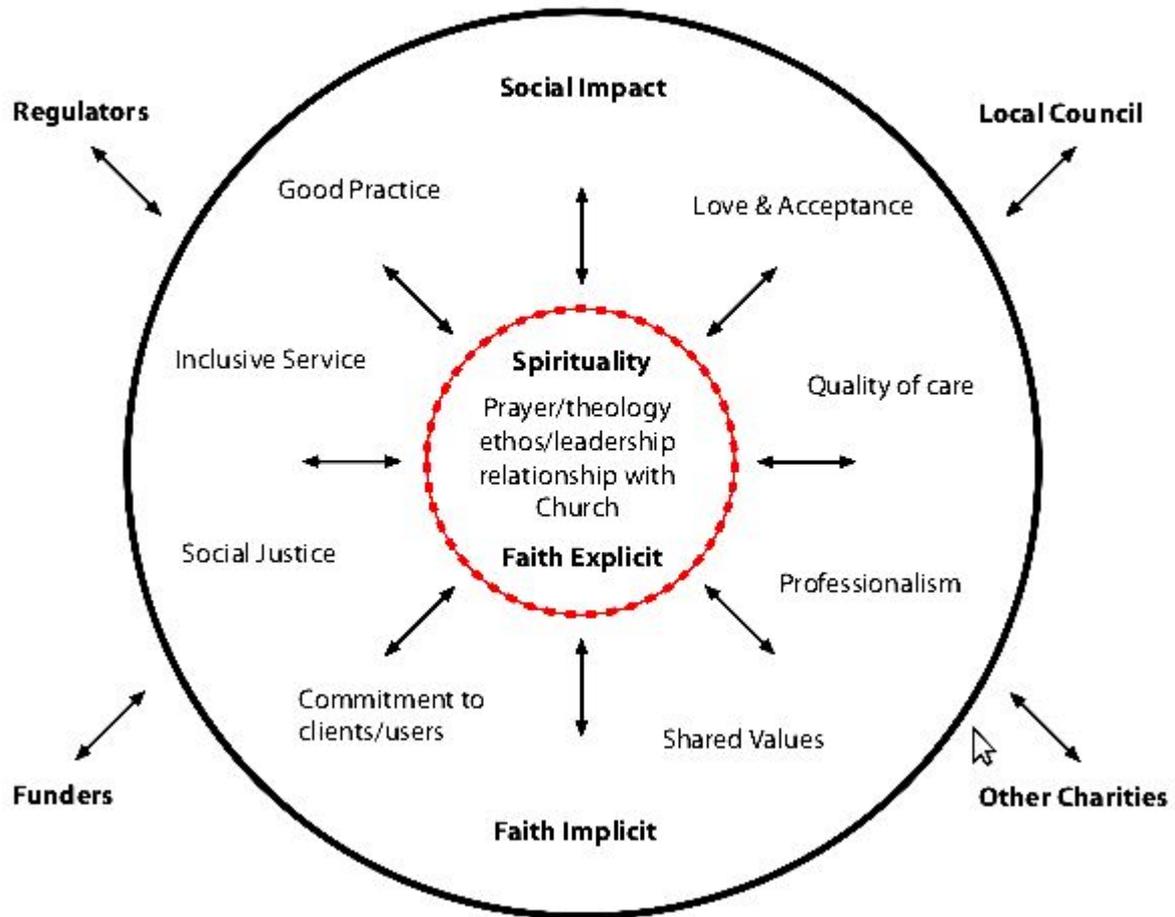
- Even missional work carried out exclusively by the Church including regular Sunday services and associated activities will frequently involve use of space and resources that are managed by the Centre. So the missional work of the Church will often overlap with the work of the Centre .

Transparency

- The Church must be honest about its beliefs and intentions.
- The Centre must be honest about its business.
- Openness across the breadth of the St Marys organisation-family is essential to our work.

Explicit Ethos

The work of the Centre may be affected negatively by its explicit relationship to a 'church', for instance those who consider churches or religious organisations to be bad things may not give their business or support to an organisation which is closely related to an active Christian church. However it may also be affected positively, (for instance by being the preferred customer of those sympathetic to an explicitly Christian ethos) and while there is a need for sensitivity in all communications (see below) the Church takes the view that the 'explicit ethos' described in *Keeping the Faith*^[1] is the best model for describing the ethos



Above diagram taken from Church Urban Fund document, as is the following explanation:

Life-giving faith at the core

The first circle shows what a healthy Christian ethos could look like in practice. One example of this could be a church project or Christian charity with a living and dynamic Christian spirituality expressed through prayer, articulated theology, specific events, explicit wording, signage or actions. For projects where the Christian basis of the work is to the fore, these explicit faith elements should make sense outwardly through accessible language and creativity. While a grant-maker or local authority commissioner may not attend a prayer meeting for example, every explicit activity should be explainable so others can begin to see how these elements bring life to the local context. The core of the circle in the diagram could be described as an engine at work in an organisation, bringing life to the important values shown outside the inner circle. Values such as good practice, love, quality of care and social justice are here inspired by clear Christian theology, and a positive outworking of this might, for example, result in a project gaining a reputation for inclusivity welcoming a wide range of clients because it is modelled

on the radical inclusion of Jesus seen throughout the gospels. However, subtlety is needed to prevent what could be interpreted as Christian chauvinism; there is a temptation to slip into defensive language such as ‘We are a Christian project but inclusive of all people’. The key stakeholders identified on the outside of the circle may not necessarily understand or place a high value on the core explicit Christian ethos, but will be keen to see the actual positive values being lived out. Internally, it requires a clear and shared confidence across the organisation as to how Christian beliefs truly shape the work. The skill is often in articulating the connection between the explicit beliefs and the project’s values – what it believes and what it does to enact its beliefs – in a way that makes sense to people unfamiliar with Biblical language or church jargon.”

In *Keeping the Faith*, this positive model is contrasted with three other possibilities.

St Marys Core Beliefs and Behaviours

ETHOS	CORE BELIEF	CORE BEHAVIOURS
Care for Creation	We believe in God who is maker of heaven and earth, who has placed humankind in the world both to enjoy and care for creation.	We will seek to recognise both the abundance and the fragility in the world. We will be mindful of the impact of all our decisions and actions on our fragile and finite environment. We will measure and reduce the environmental impact of our activities
Creating Community in which everyone is valued	We believe that the nature of God is relational as expressed in an understanding of the Trinity and that human beings are made in the image of God and share in God’s nature. Relationships and creativity are central to our being and flourishing.	We will strive to build and rebuild community that is inclusive, celebrating diversity, accepting and respecting of each other equally, recognising responsibility and seeking to respond to and resolve conflict where it may occur. We will be creative and innovative in our business.
Life in all its fullness	Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full – abundantly” (John 10.10)	We will work together with others to realise the God given potential of each person. Working to increase human flourishing and realising the abundance of underutilised human and material resources in order to create a better world.
Hope that things can change for the	The bible gives us images of both the vision and the	We will nurture and respect the dreams of each other and work

better.	realisation of hope. In the message of the Kingdom of God, which is a vision of justice and joy, health and abundance. (Isaiah 65.17f) and in the Incarnation of God; in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.	together to achieve a better future for individuals and communities. We will live with the realistic hope that transformation is always possible and that even the darkest situations can be overcome.
Addressing injustice	God requires us to pursue justice with mercy. Jesus taught that our neighbours, whom we are to serve, are not the people most like us, but those who most need our help.	We will support campaigning, lobbying and speaking out against injustice, especially on behalf of the poor. We will actively and preferentially seek ways in which we can provide services for those who are disadvantages, excluded, lonely, sick, bereaved, imprisoned or otherwise suffering.
Good News	We believe that God in Christ shares our human nature and so is able to redeem it to reflect the image of God in which we were made. We believe that the message of Christ is central to community transformation. At the same time we recognise and value the essential contribution that other faiths and those of no creedal faith make to this transformation	We will respect and celebrate the faith of others, listening to their faith stories. We will also continue to explore and seek to live out the faith that undergirds our values and actions and endeavour to make space for those who wish to explore this faith with us.

St Mary's will not impose our beliefs on anyone but we do expect those who work and volunteer for us to adopt these behaviours.

Practicalities

As suggested in *Keeping the Faith*, the struggles around retaining Christian distinctiveness can be divided into the following main issues

a. Ethos, values and governance

- A majority of Trustees will be members of St Marys worshipping congregation and should be able to sign up to the beliefs and behaviours described above.
- A wider group of Trustees may be recruited from time to time with specific expertise, who may not share the beliefs, but support the behaviours.

b. Staffing/volunteers

Staff and volunteers in St Marys should be familiar with this ethos document and by taking up their posts, explicitly agree to abide by the behaviours described above.

Some posts within the organisation will require their holders to be able to sign up to the beliefs as well as the behaviours outlined above. This will apply when the majority of the responsibilities of the job are connected to upholding the ethos of the organisation.

c. Links between community project and church

The unusual situation of the Centre being a business based within a place of worship may give rise to particular sensitivities. Because of this, and because the behaviours of St Mary's are, as described here, directed by the beliefs of the Church, the Directors have a key responsibility to ensure that Church and Centre are communicating well, with each other, and with the world. This may include ensuring

- Regular updates to the Church from Centre staff
- Coherence and quality of all communications, inward and outward, including website and social media with special care for the image of the whole organisation.
- Involvement of Church members as volunteers, customers, staff, and advocates of the Centre's services.
- That Centre staff and volunteers understand St Marys' Ethos
- Reviews of the image of the building itself including consideration of worship spaces, artwork and signage.
- Bringing the strengths of both Church and Centre together, for instance to help with campaigns or political lobbying through Church channels, around issues arising through Centre services.

d. Funding

Government and LA funding are good opportunities. Some guidance:

- Have I been completely truthful in what I've said?
- Whose agenda are we serving? Whose empire am I building?
- Would another organisation be better placed to deliver this project?
- Are we staying true to our original vision?
- Do we really need this money?

e. Managing buildings

The church building is a huge asset for both Church and Centre. Expectations about management should be described in a separate 'handbook' document. This should also describe mechanisms for completing and recording maintenance. Changes in use of parts of the building or territory should be referred to the PCC, as they are the long-term responsibility of the Church.

f. Partnership with statutory services

Can lead to compromise, but sometimes 'missio Dei' ie God's mission was there first, leading the church, not the other way round. Collaboration can point to the kingdom of God, don't forget the big picture.

References

1. 'Keeping the Faith - retaining Christian distinctiveness in your community project'
<http://www.cuf.org.uk/keeping-faith> Church Urban Fund
2. The Five Marks of Mission
<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>