

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# CHRIST CHURCH CAMBRIDGE

*Text, design and photography*

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as  
Community Assets for the Common Good)**  
is a multi-partner research project that  
aims to help communities make fuller use  
of their churches.

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*The project is implemented by*

**Centre for Social Innovation at  
Cambridge Judge Business School  
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**[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)**

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and a sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website [www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: North front of Christ Church Cambridge viewed from Newmarket Road.*

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# CHRIST CHURCH CAMBRIDGE

**Church Category:** Urban

**Deanery:** Cambridge North

**Address:** Christchurch St,  
Cambridge CB1 1HT

**Website:**

[www.christchurchcambridge.org.uk](http://www.christchurchcambridge.org.uk)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** Grade II listed building; Modern glass entrance porch; Flexible seating and fixed side pews; Perpendicular style windows; Big aisle galleries; Downstairs hall; Upstairs auditorium; WC facilities; Kitchen; Lift; Car parking and bike railings; also responsible for semi-derelict St Andrew the Less church which is moving towards formal closure

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 450 / 4,489

**Fundraising:** Fundraising not used in financial planning; twice-yearly provision of information about church finances and giving

**Income Generation:** Parish giving (95%), other income (4%), rental income (1%)

**Communications:** Website; TV monitors in foyer serve as 'notice boards'; Weekly newsletter; Email subscription; Monthly e-bulletin; Church welcome packs; Facebook; Instagram; YouTube; Spotify; Soundcloud; Flickr; Mobile apps; Flyers

**Community Engagement:** The Embassy (Free weekly English as additional language teaching sessions); The Barn (international hospitality run by Friends International); Christianity Explored courses run regularly; community workgroups in collaboration with The Besom; Hosting for Cambridge Churches Homeless Project; Craft groups; Baby Steps (group for new parents); First Steps (twice-weekly parents & toddlers group); Sunday creche and children's groups for up to age 14; Midweek youth groups for 11–14s and 14–18s; Midweek young adults groups (meal and group meetings); Daddy & Me (monthly dads and under-5s meeting); Monthly Lunch and Weekly exercise group for over-50s.

# ROOTS



## Profile

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Christ Church stands within the Conservative Evangelical tradition of the Church of England. The parish church is located in the Market ward of Cambridge, a central area of the city that includes the Grafton Centre shopping development and a mix of older residential properties and more modern apartments, some of which have been built specifically for the student population. The Market ward has the largest proportion of residents assessed as 'settled' in the city of Cambridge, with 20–30% identified as 'transient'. However, a large proportion of properties are rented from private landlords. The population of the parish is 4,489 people (2016 census). The population of the ward was estimated to be 8,900 in April 2011 in 1,600 households.<sup>1</sup> The population of the city as a whole was 123,900, including 24,506 students, according to the 2011 census.

The river Cam runs through the western to the northern corner of the ward, with university boathouses and residential barges strung along the riverbank. The ward is bisected by a number of busy roads, including the Newmarket Road. A large common, Midsummer Common, is on its western edge, which hosts many fairs and events and is used predominantly for recreational purposes. Cambridge is well connected to both the motorway network (M11, A14) and to the rail network to London and to the north.

This part of Cambridge is also home to other religious organisations: The Anglican All Saints church (now closed for worship), Wesley Methodist Church, Eden Baptist Church, Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue, and Westcott House, a Church of England theological college. The surviving chapel of the Leper Chapel of Saint Mary Magdalene is a short walk down the Newmarket Road.

The area suffers from problems with homelessness and crime figures are relatively high in relation to national norms. However, educational and employment levels are above average.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Cambridge-City-District-Report-2011.pdf>

See estimate for 2018 at <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/quick-profile/?geographyId=31f769d8c0ab435dad958d942dec31bb&featureId=E05002709>



Top: Church facade with the glass foyer entry viewed from Newmarket Road.  
Bottom: View of Christ Church from south-east (Photo by Richard Humphrey, [www.geograph.org.uk](http://www.geograph.org.uk))



## Building

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The current church building, Christ Church, traces its history from 1825 when the existing parish church, which is officially St Andrew the Less, but commonly known as The Abbey Church, became too small for the growing population of the parish. Plans were made to build a new church building, with some of the funds raised by subscription. The present red brick church building which was opened in 1839 is constructed in the classic East Anglian style. The church's aisled hall is built of brick, with neither tower nor chancel. One of the rare distinctions of the church is that the building is orientated north and south. The north front is an architectural echo of King's College Chapel with four distinctive turrets on the corners and a great 'west' window (north window in fact). Christ Church is another of the Cambridge churches designed by Ambrose Poynter, who was also responsible for St Paul's on Hills Road and St Andrew the Great in the town centre. There is a separate building at the rear of the church which originally functioned as a choir vestry but is now mostly used for youth work.

The interior comprises a flat timber roof, but the shape of the arcades and the clerestory windows are Perpendicular in style. In the early 1970s a hall owned by the church was compulsorily purchased when the Grafton Centre was being developed. This left the church with a sum of money but no church hall. At that point a plan was conceived to install a floor at the level of the galleries to create an upstairs auditorium (where Sunday services would take place) and a downstairs hall and kitchen.

In 2004 through a collaboration with St Andrew the Great, about 90 people joined Christ Church as part of a church 'graft'. This created a momentum which led to a major refurbishment of the church building and injection of people and giving.



Over a five-year period, a range of work was undertaken including the installation of a new lift, a new heating system and the creation of several new rooms both on the ground floor and first floor. A new industrial standard kitchen was installed alongside a new kitchen servery. Five WCs were installed. A play area was created in the churchyard accessed from the church hall by a new doorway. In the upstairs auditorium the central pews were removed and replaced with flexible seating. The font was relocated, and a new raised stage area created at the front. A new sound system, new TV screens and new lighting were all installed.

The final phase of the refurbishment was the replacement of a derelict front porch with a new foyer and front offices. This also involved relocating a section of the front railings in order that the former narrow gate could be replaced by a broad open entrance continuous with the pavement. A small car park was formed to be available for those with restricted mobility. Further parking is available in nearby public car parks. A member of the church was employed to manage the refurbishment, which cost in the region of £1 million.

The church is open all week except Saturday. On weekdays, the church is open from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. and on Sunday, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. On some Sunday evenings the church runs an online seminar at 7.30 p.m. on Zoom. The building can accommodate 400 people in the upstairs auditorium and 130 downstairs in the main hall.

*Above: Panoramic view of the upstairs auditorium with flexible seating and side pews (Photo by Christ Church Cambridge).*

# RUNNING

## Team

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The ministry team of Christ Church includes two senior ministers and several associate ministers. There is an associate minister responsible for music, one for children's work and another for youth work. The current staff team has 13 members, some of whom are part-time. The administrative team includes an operations manager, an office administrator, a finance and HR manager and a pastoral associate.

A range of teams made up of members of the congregation serve in various areas of church life including hospitality (Host Team), managing the welcome and refreshments at all Sunday services.

## Religious Services

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The normal pattern on Sundays is two identical morning services at 9.30 and 11.15 a.m. at which a creche for under-3's and groups for children and young people aged 3–14 are available. The Sunday evening service offers a more contemporary form of worship. A monthly gathering offers a more traditional and liturgical service. A monthly prayer meeting, Prayer 150, is held on a Wednesday night and is a key meeting with 90 minutes of news and prayer. The congregation of Christ Church is currently in the region of 330 adults and 120 children. A range of Christmas services are planned each year that are designed to appeal to guests and visitors and these would often be attended by more than 2,000 people across the Christmas period.

**Week of Prayer** is an annual event that Christ Church organises in the autumn. This includes daily hour-long prayer gatherings culminating in a **Day of Prayer** on Saturday where, from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., people are encouraged to come to the church building for an hour of individual prayer. Short video prayers are shared daily on the website and social media channels.

Christ Church has longstanding links with Eden Baptist Church, with whom a joint Good Friday service is held every year, alternating between the two churches. Christ Church also has strong links with **St John's Church in Orchard Park** ([www.stjohnsorcharpark.org](http://www.stjohnsorcharpark.org)) which was developed in collaboration with the Church of the Good Shepherd (see also REACH Ely case study *Good Shepherd Chesterton*). A former curate at Christ Church moved to become vicar there in 2012 along with a small number from the church family. The church now meets in school premises in the Orchard Park development to the north of Cambridge.

In 2019 a collaboration with St George's Church in Chesterton led to a number of individuals and families leaving Christ Church to help establish a new church initiative, Hope Church, in East Chesterton which began to meet in Shirley School.





Top and bottom: Views of the church foyer with information banners, sofa, and the reception area.  
 Middle: Panoramic view of the downstairs hall (Photos by Doug Robar).

**Covid-19 impact.** During the national lockdown Christ Church Cambridge was locked in line with the Church of England's requirements for all church buildings. The church conducted online services and a range of other online activities including a new initiative for new parents called Baby Steps (*see Engagement*). Regular updates via **website** and **social media channels** were maintained and **new blogs** and **vlogs** were created. Other church groups, such as Pathfinders and Tuesday Central, also moved online.

A **task group** was formed to help church ministry going forward and to look at mid-term and longer-term plans. A special section on Covid-19 was added to the church website where regular updates of the task group's weekly meetings and plans were shared.

In September 2020, Christ Church reopened in accordance with social distancing guidelines, and new shorter **services in the church building** were provided at 9.00, 10.15, 11.30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Each lasted 45 minutes and involved children's activities for 3–11s in the morning; those for younger children taking place in family groups with a parent/carer present. Since a creche was not available to ensure social distancing, a room was made available for nursing mums and parents to use if they wanted. The church allowed a limited number of people at each service and allocated people with a bi-weekly **attendance system**. When after-service gathering was not possible due to social distancing measures, the church encouraged members of the congregation to use the open space at **Midsummer Common** to walk and talk safely in line with government guidelines. The newly formed church media team began a **livestream** of the 10.15 a.m. service on a **YouTube** channel. A **welcome video** with guidelines and practicalities on returning to the church building was published on the **website** and **social media**.

### **Ministry Share**

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In 2020, Christ Church ministry share was £62,531.

### **Finances and giving**

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No collections are taken on Sundays. Most giving from the congregation is made via standing orders. Information about church finances is presented twice a year – once at the time of the Annual Church Meeting and once at a Giving Sunday (usually in early November). Typically, a colour brochure is produced which includes a reflection on the Bible's teaching about money, a summary of the church's finances and details of any specific giving target. One of the churchwardens would usually be interviewed on a Sunday just before Giving Sunday and asked to respond to some of the typical questions asked about the church finances.

### **Income Generation**

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Over 95% of church income is from the giving of church members. A much smaller amount comes from honorariums for teaching responsibilities fulfilled by staff members away from Christ Church. A very small proportion (around 1%) is income from renting out rooms in the church building for events such as conferences and birthday parties. The auditorium seats up to 400 with flexible seating and fixed side pews. The hall seats 130 and has a kitchen and servery. There are two meeting rooms available for hire.



“The church community was supportive of the [renovation] project. Many went without in order to give financially to the building’s transformation and the Gospel work here. The facilities were graciously maintained by long-serving wardens and PCC members. We are always exploring how to engage with our community as much as possible, both online and in person during these times of Covid restrictions.”

**Ben Cook**

Operations manager

## **Communications**

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The church has a well-developed **website** with detailed information on church services and events, dedicated sections on activities for children, youth, young adults, small groups, seniors, and international students and visitors. An archive of recent **church talks** and **blog posts** is also provided on the website. **Children and Youth Resources** offer inspirational talks to help families and young people engage with God’s word. A weekly **newsletter** and a monthly **e-bulletin**, with information about church life and events, are available to those who are on the church’s **email distribution list**.

The church is active in using various social media channels – Facebook, Instagram (@christchurchcambridgeuk), YouTube, Soundcloud, Spotify, and Flickr. The church also uses two **mobile apps** – Christ Church Cambridge app to give access to sermon recordings, church calendar, and prayer diary, and ChurchSuite app for church members to book events and stay in touch.

Two TV **monitors**, on the glass front wall and in the foyer of the church, and **information banners** display information about services and upcoming events and invite visitors to enter. At Christmas and Easter, the church distributes 3,000 **flyers** in the parish.



1st row: Sunday church service; 2nd row: Church weekend away; The Revd Steve Midgley delivers a talk; 3rd row: Men's Bible study group meeting; 4th row: Church weekend away in 2019 (Photos by Christ Church Cambridge).

# REACH

## Community

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**Language Sessions and International Visitors.** Christ Church runs a weekly Saturday session, **The Embassy**, for those wanting to learn English as an additional language. The session provides a free one-hour English lesson and help with any English document form-filling. There is an additional optional Bible study following the sessions and many choose to attend. There is also a Polish-speaking Bible study group that runs on a Saturday afternoon.

**The Barn.** This free international café, run by Friends International, takes place every Thursday evening from 7.30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Christ Church. In July and August the café relocates to St Andrew's Street Baptist Church and is run by the Cambridge International Outreach. The Barn is a friendly place to practise English, learn about British culture, meet friends and participate in quizzes, dancing, board games, and food events. Every week has a different topic and nearly all activities are free. The café is hosted by Christians from various churches around Cambridge.

**The Explore Course** is a new course for newcomers of all backgrounds wishing to take a more in-depth look at the Christian faith. The eight-week course is run by Friends International and begins in April with a meal provided.

**Christianity Explored** is a similar course, run by Christ Church most terms as an introduction to the Christian faith and provides an opportunity to read through and discuss Mark's account of the life of Christ.

**The Besom.** Christ Church partners with this Christian social action charity which helps connect churches with those in need within the city. The team collaborate with social workers to identify people who need support, whether that be with DIY, gardening or critically needed household goods or baby bundles.

**Biblical Counselling.** Wise counsel to help support those facing typical life challenges is in high demand. The church has strong links with Biblical Counselling UK, a charity that provides training and support to churches to help them develop their personal pastoral care. A three-year Certificate Programme runs at six venues across the UK and a church-based intern scheme involving a dozen part-time interns are both coordinated by staff based at Christ Church.

**Mission Partners.** Christ Church partners with a number of other churches and families with the aim of supporting church-based and evangelistic activities both at home and overseas.

“Christ Church, as you might expect, begins with Jesus. Because He shapes everything that any church should be. And that is why opening up the Bible and hearing Christ’s teaching is at the centre of all that we do. We’re convinced that the gospel message is the great driver for change in our world, both changing the lives of individuals, and changing the life of a whole community as well.”

From the church’s introductory video





*Congregation members in the church (Photo by Doug Robar).*

## Events

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**Welcome evenings** are normally hosted once or twice a term at the vicarage where introductions to the church family take place over a meal for around 20–30 people. Since lockdown these events have moved online.

**Tackling Life** is a series of occasional talks or interviews designed to be of interest to those not regularly involved at Christ Church. Recent events have tackled: 5 Big Questions for a Coronavirus World, Covid on my Mind (the mental health impact of a pandemic); Is forgiveness possible? (an interview with Tamar Pollard, whose father was murdered while serving Christ overseas); Olympic Challenge (an interview with Olympic rower Debbie Flood).

**Children's events** usually include an annual week-long Holiday Club, a light party on Halloween and a fireworks night event.

**Craft Groups.** The church has run a fortnightly painting group and a weekly knitting group.

**Music.** The associate minister for music oversees a team of around 30 singers and musicians who lead the worship on Sundays. These musicians meet once a term for Music Matters – where musicians and sound technicians together learn from the Bible, build musicianship, pray and try out new songs. **Prayer & Praise** is an extended time of sung worship and prayer for the whole church family and occasional informal **Jam Sessions** allow musicians to play and socialise together.



## Engagement

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**Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP).** Christ Church is a participating member in the Cambridge Churches Homeless Project that runs throughout the winter across seven churches, who take turns to provide a friendly welcome, hot supper, and safe space to sleep for around 12 guests. Christ Church has usually hosted on Monday nights throughout February and March (*See also REACH Ely case studies: St Mark Cambridge and St Philip Cambridge*).

**Christ Church aims to offer activities for all age ranges. These include:**

**Creche** for children up to the age of 3 during both Sunday morning services, manned by volunteers from the church.

**Sunday Club.** Children between 3 and 14 attend the first part of the Sunday morning services before going out with their leaders to their own small groups. Activities include crafts, singing and games, all based on a programme of Bible teaching.

**First Steps** is a group for parents and carers with children up to 4 years old. The group meets on Wednesday and Friday mornings to support and befriend parents and carers of toddler-age children. A new Baby Steps group offering support to new parents began with online sessions during the pandemic.

**Engagement** *(continued)*

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**Daddy and Me** is an informal monthly playgroup for 0–5 years-olds with their dads, grandads, or male carers.

**Pathfinders** for 11–14 years-olds meets on Sunday mornings and Friday evenings.

**Grafted** is a group for 14–18 years-olds that meets on Friday evenings.

**Tuesday Central** provides a network for students, internationals and those in the 18–30s range allowing them to meet people at a similar stage of life for a weekly meal and Bible study.

**Small groups.** In addition to Tuesday Central, other small groups include: **Home Groups** (15 groups meet in homes across the city), **Women’s Morning Groups** (five groups meeting on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings), **Men’s Early Morning Bible Study group** (Friday mornings).

**Parenting Seminars.** About once a term, the church hosts a seminar on parenting issues ranging from toddlers to teenagers, where parents with experience of these age groups share their wisdom.

**Lunches for Seniors** run once a month with a speaker and a buffet lunch. Members of the church also visit the elderly in their homes.

**Exercise for Seniors.** A physiotherapist in the church runs a weekly strength and balance class for the over-50s.



Top three: Painting and sculpture free art exhibition 'The Heart of Things' by Paul Hobbs;  
Bottom: Crafts group and Church weekend away (Photos by Christ Church Cambridge).

# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

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### **Making room for a large congregation and community activities**

In 2012, numbers at the morning service (and particularly the children's groups) had outgrown the available space which led to the decision to divide the morning service into two. Since then, involvement in two church plants has also helped to reduce numbers at the morning services and make space for others to join. Church planting continues to be part of the vision of the church leadership and one of three distinctive elements in the church's Shared Purpose Statement.

### **Continuing to grow the congregation**

The impetus for the recent growth of the church lies in the church graft from St Andrew the Great in 2004. Numbers attending grew steadily from 100 adults to 350 adults over the following 10 years. In line with church growth research the rate of growth decreased as numbers attending approached the capacity of the building.

## Lessons Learned

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### **To put Christ at the centre**

The church's priority has been to put teaching the Christian faith from the Bible at the centre of its activities. This has proved to be the means by which new people have been attracted to the church family as well as providing the driving force for sacrificial service in church life and generous financial giving.

**To work in partnership**

The original collaboration with St Andrew the Great that allowed the church graft, and subsequent collaboration with the Church of the Good Shepherd and St George's Chesterton (see also *REACH Ely case study St George Chesterton*), have all enabled growth through church grafting/planting.

Local partnership with social action agencies helps to connect the church to the needs of the underprivileged within the community in order that, where possible, the church can respond to those needs with offers of help.

**To be open and responsive to change**

The leadership team constantly reviews the success of new initiatives and is open to new ways to engage both the congregation and the local community. The church's activities are driven by a commitment to Christ and a desire to make the Christian faith known. Those in charge of events bring feedback to a weekly staff meeting for review. Starting new initiatives and employing new staff to lead those initiatives has been critical to growth.

**To create a living church**

The church is busy throughout the week with clubs and church groups tailored for all ages. The team also connect with the local community, by visiting the elderly, for example.

**To mobilize a large volunteer base**

The church is dependent on the commitment of its regular members who lead groups, welcome and meet people, support others in the church family and give generously both of time and money.

**To foster ongoing links with other churches**

As well as the collaborative efforts that have been associated with church plants and grafts, Christ Church also works closely with other churches in the city across denominational boundaries. It also supports evangelical missionaries at home and abroad and also financially supports two churches in economically deprived areas, one within and the other outside Ely diocese.



“[We are] a growing evangelical Anglican church. We aim to be contemporary, informal and accessible... working with young adults, families, children and teenagers, as well as students, internationals and older people in the local area.”

**Ben Cook**

Operations manager

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Community Assets for the Common Good**

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