

The Harbour Church Whitstable

Church Profile

March 2024

10 Harbour Street, Whitstable. CT5 1AQ www.thcw.org.uk

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# Introduction

The Harbour Church Whitstable is an independent Church. We are Christians who love Jesus, know the power of his Holy Spirit in our lives, and want to share his love and blessings with others. We teach and believe the Bible, and use it as our textbook for living - it is God’s living word.

God has set us in the heart of Whitstable with a real desire to introduce people to the Lord Jesus. We are praying and seeking God for growth and we are prepared for change, because above all we seek for the glory of God and for the growth of His kingdom.

# Governance

## Registered Charity

The Harbour Church Whitstable is a registered charity number 1037641 operating under a Trust Deed dated
10th May 1994, amended 12th October 2018.

## Trustees

We currently have three Trustees who are responsible for the governance of the Charitable Trust, all current committed members of the Church.

The Trustees are charged with the legal duties associated with the Charity and ensuring that the activities of the Charity accord with the Objects of the Charity.

## Church Leadership

The Leadership Team with spiritual responsibility for the mission and ministry of the Church are known as the Oversight. We believe that church leadership should be exercised by people whose lives are honouring to God, who are not looking for status but who demonstrate a servant heart, and who can operate as part of a team to provide strong, loving leadership.

We are blessed with a leadership which is Godly, humble, strong yet low-key, committed to the Lord and to the church.

Our current senior leader, Pastor Alan Mitchell, oversees the spiritual and practical ministry of the church, guided and assisted by the Oversight, comprising Tim Corke, Brian Farley and Peter Banks. Oversight Meetings are held regularly, with urgent matters and decisions being discussed/decided in between.

Believing in the priesthood of all believers, other leadership roles are filled using the same criteria. Responsibility is carried personally but shared through the Church as we pray for and support all our leaders.

## Decision Making

We have a history of leadership-led decision making which serves us well as we value ideas and invite opinions but leave the responsibility of making decisions with the Oversight leadership of the Church.

It is our experience that when decisions are clearly explained and well communicated, they are supported by the membership. The example we cite is one where Leaders lead but if there is no flock following the Leaders, the Leaders are not leading well. In this model, the responsibility is on the Leaders rather than the sheep.

Following this through, we do not see the church as a democracy, but in humility we see leadership as responsible under God for the spiritual and practical well-being of the church, including both people and buildings.

Hence the Oversight accept responsibility for decisions made, but do consult on ideas. We invite and welcome comment from any member so that suggestions or concerns are taken into account.

## Basis of Belief

As members of the Evangelical Alliance we subscribe wholeheartedly to the EA basis of faith
(www.thcw.org.uk/ basisoffaith.htm)

We hold to, and apply, biblical teaching (doctrine), examining and teaching scripture as a whole, understanding and interpreting the Bible prayerfully and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We look to God to produce maturity so that we become well-grounded Christians whose lives and lifestyles honour God.

## Purpose Statement

Our purpose is ‘to be God’s family ~ a living expression of Jesus Christ’.

## Mission Statement

Our mission is: ‘to bring people to Jesus and into the fellowship of the church, growing and developing worshipping disciples who are empowered by the Holy Spirit for a life that serves and glorifies God.’

## Vision & Year Text

It is our custom to produce an annual text card, intended to give a focus to prayer and signpost the direction and ambition of the church. The Oversight pray about, discuss, and decide future vision, and seek to reflect that in a printed Year Text for people to take and have on display in their homes.

The 2023/24 year text is
“The path of the upright is a highway : The path of life leads upwards for the prudent.” Proverbs 15:19, 24.

We start our church year around end of April – beginning of May, generally after Easter and away from other competing calendar events.

# Sunday Bible Teaching

Following some years when we were inspired by the ‘Purpose Driven’ model of a balanced, biblically based approach to personal discipleship and church life, we now continue that general model by compiling ‘preaching series’ in a balance of focus which includes Old and New Testament books, Biblical themes, topical issues and a seasonal focus, for instance for Easter and Christmas.

These ‘series’, devised in-house, provide a framework for our team of preachers to use the scripture passage and topic as a basis, and prayerfully preach what God gives. Sermons are now recorded and usually uploaded to the website.

In accordance with our practice to encourage people to use God-given gifts, our preaching and worship-leading teams include ladies as well as men.

# Spiritual Growth

While our purpose, mission and vision statements provide strategic direction for us, the preaching series draw our attention to what God calls us to do as his people and who He calls us to be as disciples. Increasingly we are aware that it’s not all about activity and church programmes, but it is about relationship and awareness of God’s presence in every area of our lives.

We also seek to discover, develop and deploy God-given spiritual gifts so that our service is effective for His glory. We encourage ‘body’ ministry and, although use of gifts in public services is not at present usual, we are open to expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as God gives them to serve His purposes, as noted below in ‘Worship Style and Content’.

# Relationships with other churches

We are active participating members of Churches Together in Whitstable, and our Pastor meets regularly with other church leaders at the monthly Ministers Meeting. We have warm and beneficial relationships with other churches.

Whilst we are independent of denominational connections, we are very much connected with other churches. Whitstable churches and church leaders are increasingly operating in partnership together, and as we demonstrate unity in Christ, so we look for God to work in power and be glorified in this town.

# Churches in Communities

As an Independent Church we have been pleased to become a member church of Churches in Communities International (CiC), an association of like-minded, missional Christian ministries, providing accreditation, recognition and encouragement for independent churches, ministries, chaplains and networks. (www.cicinternational.org)

# Worship Style and Content

Our style and emphasis can be described as evangelical charismatic, and our teaching & preaching encourages a personal relationship with God outworking in practical Christian discipleship. We have a fairly relaxed style, but we honour and reverence God and respect his holy presence.

We desire to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our public worship services. It is our conviction that each believer who is inspired to contribute should have an opportunity to do so, and we encourage this within an ordered framework. Our worship style is intended to reflect this ethos, being structured and organised whilst at the same time being flexible and spontaneous.

We are open to a full range of songs and hymns, new and old. Our Pastor (pianist) is currently our only musician and encourages discerning use of songs/hymns so that we choose those which we find say something useful, and which are suitable for congregational singing. Our singing is enthusiastic and, where appropriate, of good volume too!

Since we are persuaded that spiritual gifts are scriptural and valid in today’s church, we are open to the use of gifts in the context of public worship. Contributions to worship are welcomed from people who may be reminded of a Bible verse, bring prayer in a worship setting, or give a word of testimony. Essentially, we do desire and expect to encounter God together, and so we also allow Him to influence and impact the reality of our lives.

# Finances & Giving

The income of the church comes principally through Sunday offerings (now predominantly given directly into the bank) and rent income from the flat above the adjacent church-owned premises. We encourage regular committed giving and as a Registered Charity we operate the Gift Aid scheme which enhances gifts from taxpayers.

Our attitude to giving is that the scriptures encourage it (and we teach in terms of 10%) but it is up to individuals how to distribute it. Many people like to give directly to missions and other Christian charities, so whilst the principle is there, people are free to distribute their tithe as they wish, including giving to the church.

Gifts given from church funds are authorised by the Oversight. We give substantially to mission activity in UK and around the world which averages 40-50% of our gross annual income. But we also have commitment to mission in and from our own premises.

We maintain, and from time to time improve, our equipment and premises.

We do not at present have paid employees, our current pastor being self-supporting.

# Communion

In the Harbour Church we emphasise the personal devotional life of every believer, but we also gather to express our corporate and united devotion to our Saviour in communion. Once each month in the morning, and otherwise if this is appropriate, we spend time at the Lord’s Table in worship and adoration for His sacrifice on the cross which has bought life for us.

Bread is broken and wine distributed, and all who love the Lord Jesus may participate. The decision whether to take or pass is left to the individual. The bread really is bread. We use fruit cordial rather than wine and we drink from individual cups.

Home communion is offered to those who are house bound and therefore unable to attend worship services.

# Baptism

The scripture says ‘believe and be baptised’, and so we seek to bring those who have come to living faith in Jesus to baptism as part of their public confession to follow Christ.

We have a baptistery in the church constructed below the floor which allows us to offer and practice baptism by full immersion in water.

# Belonging

Without a formal membership it can be uncertain how you get to belong. We don’t feel that belonging is a matter of signing up or making promises but rather is about becoming part of the church family. Our hope and prayer is that before long, people new to the church will speak of ‘my’ church rather than ‘your’ church!

We invite people to attend what we call ‘Our DNA’ – an informal opportunity normally including a meal, to discuss and explain a lot of the information contained in this Profile. It is good to have open discussion and exploration of the beliefs and practices of The Harbour Church.

People are very welcome, and our hope is that they will find acceptance for who they are, as well of course as offering acceptance of who we are.

# Family Meetings

For the past decade or more, Family Meetings have provided an opportunity for church Leadership to share vision and future direction of the Church. Family Meetings are about inspiration, not decision making. We have found a really joyful spirit of unity as we gather together for this particular purpose normally twice a year, usually now on a Sunday when we also share lunch together. Everyone who attends the church on a regular basis is encouraged to attend.

These Family Meetings have proved inspirational as we see how God is leading and directing us, and as we talk through ideas and new initiatives being planned and share news that offers encouragement. As we better appreciate just how God is leading us together, we have really been encouraged and have found great cause for thanksgiving & praise.

# Sunday Services

We describe our Morning service as ‘Worship & Word’, and enjoy a mix of worship, intercessory prayer, and preaching/teaching of the Word of God. Typically, the worship leader will give opportunity for open contributions when people participate in various ways including bringing a relevant scripture, a prayer or a personal testimony. The preaching/teaching is on a given topic working to a series plan.

# Pastoral Care

Pastor Alan’s role includes first line responsibility for the spiritual and practical care of those belonging to the Church. He is available to pray with people, head up practical support, and offer/coordinate spiritual guidance/counsel on request.

However, we like to encourage meaningful friendships and consequent relationship-based support networks, so that Alan is not by any means the only one to offer help and support.

# Service Teams

Service Teams provide an opportunity for service gifts to come to the fore in the church in specific ways, sharing on rota with others. We are not trying to give everyone a job but to enable recognised service gifts to come to the fore, and so people are invited and appointed to serve in these ministry teams utilising their personal calling and gifting.

Serving teams may greet and welcome people, read the Bible, lead intercessory prayer, steward the offering or serve communion. Other less formal teams are a real blessing in areas such as serving after-service refreshments.

Whilst not strictly speaking known as Service Teams, our Preachers and Worship Leaders also operate as supportive teams (currently 8 people are involved in these ministries) using spiritual gifts to serve the Lord and the Church.

# Web Site

There is a lot of information on our church web site, including our church history and activities. Please check out www.thcw.org.uk

# Regular Weekday Groups

## Playmates Parent and Toddler Group

Held on Tuesday mornings during term time (from 9.30 am to 11.30 am), Playmates is run in cooperation with the Community Church Whitstable, to whom we are very grateful as they provide younger leadership. It is a very popular group, often being over-subscribed and having to operate a waiting list.

Lots of activities are available for the children, and parents/carers are encouraged to engage too. Adults also benefit from friendly chat and enjoy refreshments.

## OASIS & e*X*plore

Thursday mornings at 10.30 am we gather in the church for either:

**OASIS** - which is a ½ hour of worship & prayer with a talk on a thoughtful topic to inspire our Christian walk. This is a very popular meeting regularly attracting around 15-20 people, often also including folk from other churches.

**e*X*plore** – which is 1 hour of Bible study and is a popular alternative to OASIS. Normally video based with table discussion groups, e*X*plore studies are in blocks of weeks and look deeper at Bible truths, topics, books, etc., all designed to be accessible, understandable, and relevant for life.

Refreshments enhance the time of building friendships and developing fellowship.

## Coffee & Company

Friday afternoons 2-4 pm we open the church and welcome people for refreshments and friendship. In the winter of 2022/23 we linked with the national initiative ‘Warm Spaces’ and this has continued as ‘Coffee and Company’.

We offer a warm and friendly safe space where people can enjoy a natter and a cuppa. In practice, the ladies love to chat and some knit, while the men have taken to doing puzzles. In the next few months we are planning to extend the offer to include a ‘Listening Space’.

# Premises & Location

The buildings known as 9 & 10 Harbour Street are wholly owned by the The Harbour Church Whitstable Trust and under the operational control of the Trustees. Situated in the heart of the thriving seaside town of Whitstable, the premises offer suitable facilities for the ministry and mission of the church.

Harbour Street is a busy thoroughfare linking the High Street and the Harbour, with a variety of boutique shops, cafés and residential properties. It is a charming and popular street of historic interest in the Whitstable conservation area.

As regards the church premises, in addition to the main worship area, we have a smaller rear hall and another meeting room, accessible toilet facilities and a kitchen (enlarged and refitted Autumn 2023). There is a 2 bedroomed flat (tenanted commercially) on the first and second floors of 9 Harbour Street.

We are open to Community Groups using the premises, with preference given to groups that provide help to people and particularly those whose clientele can benefit most from our style of premises, which we want to be used well. We avoid bookings from dance or sport clubs, and those which might cause stress to the building or neighbourhood in terms of noise or excessive wear and tear. We are very open to requests for children’s parties especially for those associated with Playmates.

# Mission Support

Active prayer and financial support of Missions is a key part of who we are. Over the years a number of deep relationships have developed, and these are summarised below:

## Croatia:

For many years we have supported a couple in their calling to serve God in Croatia, and this led to transporting humanitarian aid during the Balkans conflict of the 1990s. Cliff and Maria Luckhurst served in pastoring a church in Rijeka but have now retired and are involved in a wider prayer and deliverance ministry associated with Ellel Ministries.

Although we no longer transport aid, we also maintain our support of Antun Koprivnjak and Tomislav & Helena Mogus with money gifts 3 times each year, as they serve God as Church Leaders in the city of Vukovar and surrounding area.

## Belgium:

We support Lauro & Rosane Castelli who work with WEC in church planting and associated ministry areas. They are Brazilians who served the Lord in India for a number of years before being called to Europe. They now minister in Belgium.

## China:

We support Maxine Raabe in a ministry called CMI Asia. She co-founded a ministry in Vietnam to provide street people with employment (SOZO) as well as sponsoring children in orphanages. She then moved to China where she had a guesthouse offering fine accommodation to foreign tourists and employing local people. Currently she has had to leave China and now works supportively from her home in UK.

## Manchester:

Paul and Judith Keeble chose to make their home in one of the most deprived areas of this great city where Christians tend to choose not to live. Their vision is about Urban Mission and ‘Re-salting’ the city. We support them personally with finance and prayer as they serve God there in various ways.

## Canterbury Christian Schools Work Trust (CCWST):

Much closer to home, we support the CCSWT as they encourage and enable Christian groups in schools, taking assemblies and lessons, and generally informing & inspiring young people about the Christian faith. They offer mentoring of young people and work in both primary and secondary schools to promote and lead corporate worship, initiatives such as Prayer Rooms, encouraging of Christian Unions, and otherwise build relationships which provide opportunities for sharing the Gospel in our local schools.

## TEAR Fund:

We support this internationally renowned evangelical mission in their work of bringing aid to the poor. Our monthly church giving is augmented by a specific Harvest offering.

## And there’s more!

We also like to follow prayerfully and support other missions in various ways, including Love Russia, Samaritan’s Purse, SASRA (Soldier’s & Airmen’s Scripture Readers Association), Porchlight (Canterbury based homelessness charity).

# Inter-church relationships

We take an active part in Churches Together in Whitstable (CTiW) and this has brought many fruitful inter-church relationships and the opportunity to shape the organisation and activities. We keenly support CTiW partnership projects in which we work alongside other churches.

## Street (Beach) Pastors

Street (Beach) Pastors is widely supported by local churches to minister kindness and demonstrate goodness to people in the town, especially those who may have become vulnerable. Some of our folks are on the Prayer Team. Pastors go out each Friday evening between 7pm and midnight, focussing in summer months on the beach area at the recommendation of the Police and Local Authority which are very supportive of this work.

Statistics for crime and anti-social behaviour in the town show a significant and sustained reduction, for which we praise God.

## Canterbury & District Foodbank

We support the local Foodbank which serves those who are in difficulty for whatever reason.

We can also refer people who need help. The Foodbank has been very supportive of CAP Clients (see below).

## Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

The Whitstable CAP Debt Centre opened in April 2015 in order to bring Christian help to people struggling with unmanageable debt. This initiative is supported by 10 churches in the town and an email Prayer group has been set up to support the Centre Manager (Jannine Johnson of Whitstable Community Church) and pray for Clients’ needs.

# Church Age Profile

As at March 2024 the regular attending members of the church number 24, with a further 3 whose health does not allow them to attend. Our age profile is predominantly over 60 and some substantially higher than that. Some members are longstanding, but we praise God that several have joined over the last few years.

Observing this and being mindful of the responsibility for the future growth and health of the Church, we have been praying consistently and specifically for growth and development. This includes prayer about future leadership.

Our prayer has been focussed in four elements:
Prayer for **Expansion**, praying for a number of believers to be called to come and serve with us;
Prayer for **Growth**, praying for unbelievers to be born again and added to the church;
Prayer for **Life**, praying for encouragement of current members in discipleship and fellowship; and
Prayer for **Leadership**, praying for suitably gifted, long-term future leadership of the church.

# Future Leadership

For some while now, the Oversight have been discussing succession in the leadership of the Church.

From these discussions we are now actively seeking God for provision of new, younger leadership who will become a key part of the team leading the Church forward in future years. It is our expectation that this will involve fresh initiatives for growth through new areas of ministry and mission opportunity as God allows and enables.

As we actively seek God’s plan for Leadership, we have written a document, **Leader Profile**, which sits alongside this **Church Profile**.