

We're like a family that cares for others

Steven Smart found a church where he felt welcomed, where people are real with each other, and where they do hugs

Who are you? I'm Steven, I live in Gosport with my partner Chris. I'm a pastoral leader for a secondary school, and treasurer for my church.

Which churches are you part of? St Thomas the Apostle, Elson and St Matthew's, Bridgemary

Why did you start going there? I started attending St Thomas' about 11 years ago, I had previously attended a church in Gosport, but had stopped.

It was coming up to the First Sunday of Advent, a lot had been happening in my life and I felt that I needed to be in church. Being the start of the liturgical year, it also felt right that this would be a good time to return to church.

At the time I was living in Portsmouth and I didn't know anything about the churches there. Being a Christian wasn't something that had come up in conversation with any of those I associated with at the time, but I did know people who attended St Thomas'.

Like many people I felt apprehensive about how to overcome the first hurdle of stepping through the front door of a church for the first time, but



Steven Smart

I knew it would be easier for me than for most people as I already knew at least one person there.

Attending the service on that Advent Sunday, it was clear that God was present, that I would be able to worship in a way that I not only felt comfortable with, but that I would also get nourishment from for my spiritual journey, and it was clear to me that I was welcomed for who I am.

What do you love about your church?

When we were joined up with St Matthew's, it became more apparent that God's presence is very clear, and at the forefront within our two churches and

within the communities that we seek to serve.

The congregations may be classed as small in statistical terms, but they come together faithfully each week to love and serve God, to help those in need, and to pray - not just for the needs of the church and the world, but for each other and members of our communities.

We often hear about what larger congregations do. Although small in number, we also minister to hundreds of people both old and young.

We grow together as disciples of Christ, trying to the best of our ability to be like Jesus was to those whom he met.

We have a monthly foodbank collection, we hold fundraising events, not just the church, but also for others, because we are aware that there are those less fortunate than we are.

I love my church(es) because we are a family in the true sense of the word. We do real, we do prayer, we do worship, we do God's word, we do mistakes, we do forgiveness, we do second chances, we do hugs, we do family, and we do love, and that to me is what church is all about!