

## Doing Church Differently:

# Ocean Church

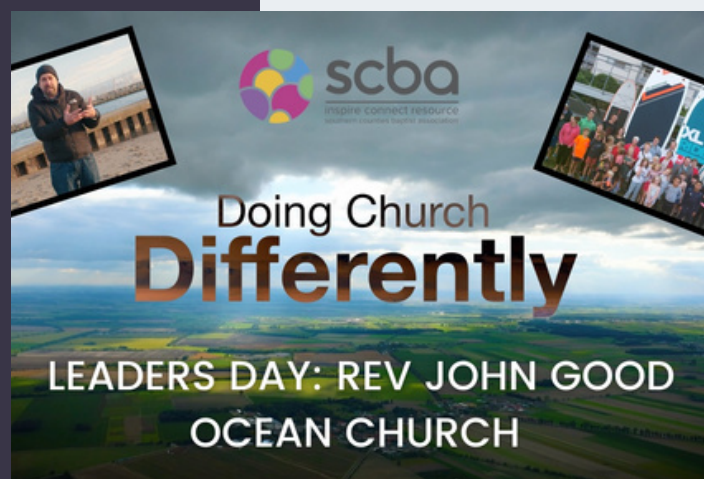
### Summary

Rev. John, a Baptist pioneer minister in Poole, Dorset, tells the story of Ocean Church, a fresh expression of church built around community, water, and adventure.

Beginning with a watersports library during COVID, people were able to borrow kayaks, surfboards, and paddleboards to enjoy the sea.

Out of this, friendships formed, well-being was supported, and opportunities emerged to talk about faith.

Ocean Church measures success not by attendance at Sunday services, but by lives changed, community formed, and people encountering God through creation, well-being, and adventure.



### Over time, Ocean Church developed into a worshipping community shaped by five principles:

- **Change the packaging:** meeting outdoors, on Saturdays, with all-age gatherings rather than traditional Sunday services.
- **Niche down:** intentionally focus on their community of “water people” rather than trying to reach everyone.
- **Experiment with leadership:** using an “advice process” so that all, including children, can share in decisions.
- **Emphasise experience:** prioritising embodied practices, prayer on the water, retreats, cold-water dips, and nature-linked spirituality.
- **Give permission:** affirming that what they are doing is real church, not just a stepping stone to “Sunday church.”

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where are the “entry points” into our church community? Do they connect with people’s everyday lives as Ocean Church’s watersports library did?
- Are we open to meeting God outside traditional spaces and times?
- What might it mean to “niche down” in our setting: focusing on a particular group of people or context?
- How participatory is our leadership? Who gets to shape decisions, and how might we involve voices from the margins?
- In what ways do we help people experience faith in embodied, practical ways, rather than only talking about it?
- Do we sometimes measure ourselves by “Sunday numbers” rather than real-life transformation?
- What permission might God be giving us to embrace new ways of being church?

# Bible Study

**Theme:** Adventure with God: Being Church Differently

**Opening Question:**

- Where do you most often feel close to God, in church, in nature, with people, in silence, in activity?

**Read Together:**

- Luke 5:1–11 Jesus calls fishermen to follow him by the water.
- Acts 16:11–15 Lydia’s conversion by the riverside.
- Romans 12:1–2 Worship as offering our whole lives.

**Discussion:**

- What strikes you about Jesus calling disciples while they were at work, in their natural environment, rather than in the synagogue?
- In Acts 16, church began by the river with a small group of seekers. How does that encourage us about where church can start?
- How might Romans 12 reshape our idea of “worship” away from Sundays only?
- Ocean Church found that adventure, well-being, and creation were bridges into faith. What bridges already exist in our community?
- John said they had to learn to affirm that this is real church. What does “real church” mean to us?
- How might we experiment with being more experiential, participatory, or contextual in our church life?

**Prayer Response:**

- Pray for the courage to reimagine church in ways that connect with your local community.
- Pray for openness to encounter God in creation and in unexpected places.
- Pray for new forms of leadership and participation in your fellowship.

**Practical Next Step (for the group):**

- Identify one small experiment you could try as a group: e.g., holding a prayer walk, hosting a meal outdoors, creating a participatory decision-making process, or trying a worship time shaped around experience.
- Commit to noticing God’s presence in nature or in an everyday activity this week, and share back with the group.