

Synopsis

Just before Sunday service, an enthusiastic reverend unveils a plan to drag his traditional church into the social media age. Faced with a sceptical organist and a practical church warden, he encounters resistance, misunderstandings and comic clashes as old traditions collide with modern ideas in unexpected ways. A contemporary comedy.

SOCIAL SALVATION

Written by Tanya Reddin
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A Contemporary Comedy

Characters

REVEREND JAMES – Early 40s. Friendly, enthusiastic, trying very hard to make the church seem modern.

MARGARET – Late 60s. The church organist. Fiercely protective of tradition and her organ.

TERRY – 70s. The church warden. Practical, slightly cynical, permanently carrying a clipboard.

Scene

A church sanctuary. Morning. The organ sits proudly to one side. TERRY is examining a clipboard. MARGARET is polishing the organ keys.

TERRY

The roof's leaking again.

MARGARET

Where?

TERRY

Everywhere.

MARGARET

Specific enough.

TERRY

Apparently rain now enters the church with greater commitment than some members of the congregation.

MARGARET

At least the rain comes every week.

REVEREND JAMES rushes in carrying a laptop and a ring light.

JAMES

Good news!

I've got a brilliant idea to attract younger people.

MARGARET

Oh no.

TERRY

What have you bought now?

JAMES

Nothing.

TERRY

That makes me even more nervous.

JAMES

We're launching a church social media channel.

Silence.

MARGARET

A what?

JAMES

Social media. Videos. Short clips. Engagement.

TERRY

The church has engagement. Half the weddings start that way.

JAMES

No, not that kind. Online engagement.

MARGARET

Why?

JAMES

Because that's where the people are.

MARGARET

People are also in supermarkets. We don't hold communion in aisle four.

JAMES

Look, churches everywhere are doing it.

TERRY

The phrase "everybody's doing it" has never ended well.

JAMES

I've prepared some content ideas.

MARGARET

I dislike the word "content."

JAMES

Listen, the first video is: "A Day in the Life of a Reverend."

MARGARET

How long is it?

JAMES

Thirty seconds.

MARGARET

That's not a day. That's barely a sneeze.

JAMES

Apparently that's the attention span these days.

TERRY

Thirty seconds?

JAMES

Yes.

TERRY

I've got parish notices longer than that.

MARGARET

I've got complaints longer than that.

JAMES

Then we can do church tours.

TERRY

We already have church tours.

JAMES

No, virtual tours.

MARGARET

People can virtually look at the damp walls.

TERRY

Maybe they'll virtually donate to repair them.

JAMES

Exactly!

JAMES sets up the ring light.

MARGARET

What's that glowing thing?

JAMES

It's a ring light.

MARGARET

Why?

JAMES

It improves appearance.

All three look at each other.

TERRY

We'd need a larger one.

JAMES

Let's make a promotional video.

MARGARET

No.

JAMES

Please?

MARGARET

No.

JAMES

Margaret, you'll be wonderful.

MARGARET

I've spent forty years avoiding attention.

TERRY

She's right. If Margaret wanted publicity she'd have joined the W.I..

JAMES

Just one take.

He points laptop camera toward them.

JAMES

Ready?

TERRY

Absolutely not.

JAMES

Three, two, one.

TERRY

Wait.

JAMES

What?

TERRY

Is this recording?

JAMES

Yes.

TERRY

Then I've already said something stupid.

JAMES

That's fine. It's authentic.

Action!

Big smile.

Welcome to Saint Matthew's Church, where faith meets community...

MARGARET

The heating's broken.

JAMES

Margaret!

MARGARET

People should know.

JAMES

We're trying to attract visitors.

MARGARET

They'll discover it eventually.

JAMES

Take two.

Smiles again.

Welcome to Saint Matthew's...

A LOUD ORGAN CHORD blasts unexpectedly.

JAMES

Margaret!

MARGARET

Sorry! Force of habit.

JAMES

Let's try something trendy.

TERRY

The last time you said that, we ended up with beanbags in the prayer room.

JAMES

People liked the beanbags.

TERRY

One person liked the beanbags and he was asleep.

JAMES

How about a challenge video?

TERRY

A what?

JAMES

A challenge.

MARGARET

We're a church. Life is the challenge.

JAMES

Fine. Maybe a question-and-answer session.

TERRY

People ask enough questions.

MARGARET

Mostly about parking.

JAMES sits, frustrated.

JAMES

Why is everyone resisting this?

MARGARET

Because every year somebody says the church must reinvent itself.

TERRY

And every year we discover people still mainly want tea and biscuits.

MARGARET

Good biscuits.

TERRY

Very important distinction.

JAMES

I just want more people to feel welcome.

Brief pause.

MARGARET

That's actually quite nice.

TERRY

Annoyingly reasonable.

JAMES

Thank you.

MARGARET

Still don't like the ring light, looks like we're summoning a very modern angel.

JAMES

Maybe we're overthinking it.

TERRY

Definitely.

MARGARET

Without question.

JAMES

What if we simply show what happens here?

TERRY

You mean... reality?

JAMES

Yes.

MARGARET

That's your revolutionary idea?

JAMES

Apparently so.

TERRY

Well, reality is me fixing things.

MARGARET

Reality is me playing hymns.

JAMES

Reality is people helping each other.

TERRY

And occasionally arguing about flower arrangements.

MARGARET

That's community.

JAMES

You know what? Let's record that.

TERRY

What?

JAMES

Us talking.

MARGARET

No script?

JAMES

No script.

TERRY

No choreography?

JAMES

No.

MARGARET

No dancing?

JAMES

Definitely no dancing.

MARGARET

Good.

JAMES starts recording.

JAMES

Hello. We're Saint Matthew's. This is Margaret.

MARGARET

Hello.

JAMES

And Terry.

TERRY

Morning.

JAMES

We're not experts in social media.

MARGARET

Or being social.

JAMES

But we're here every week.

MARGARET

Mostly.

TERRY

Unless the roof collapses.

MARGARET

Again.

JAMES

And if you're looking for somewhere welcoming...

TERRY

We've got tea.

MARGARET

...and excellent biscuits.

JAMES

And friendship.

TERRY

Plus the occasionally heating.

They all laugh.

JAMES

Perfect.

People like honesty.

MARGARET

Really?

JAMES

Apparently that's trendy now.

A notification sound comes from the laptop.

JAMES

Oh!

TERRY

What?

JAMES

We've already got comments.

MARGARET

Already?

JAMES

Someone says, "This church seems lovely."

The three look at each other.

TERRY

Well that's suspicious.

JAMES

Another says, "Where can I get the biscuits?"

MARGARET

See? Priorities.

TERRY

Maybe modern technology isn't entirely useless.

MARGARET

Let's not get carried away now.

JAMES

Can I keep the social media channel?

TERRY

On one condition.

JAMES

What?

TERRY

No dancing videos.

JAMES

Agreed.

MARGARET

And no replacing the organ with a playlist.

JAMES

Agreed.

Church bells begin ringing.

MARGARET

Service starts in five minutes.

TERRY

Time for actual people.

JAMES

My favourite kind of followers.

MARGARET

Oh that was terrible.

TERRY

Absolutely dreadful.

JAMES

I've been saving that one all morning.

Margaret sits ready at the organ.

BLACKOUT

END