

Rector Report to St Nicholas Stevenage APCM 2018.

Not long after Judy and I arrived here 7 years ago, the PCC spent some time defining what kind of church we wanted to be. Those 5Gs have shaped our mission action planning, our activities and our budgeting, and in my remarks today I want to look back at how we have met those objectives over the last year and how we might do so more in the years ahead.

Glorifying God in all we do is about doing just that. We've appointed George to lead and improve our sung worship, we've made some small upgrades to the sound system and installed a new screen to help people see the song words and visuals. We've also put in a huge amount of work on our building plans so that this place stays suitable for gospel ministry in the 21st century. More about that later.

Grounded in the Bible starts here in church with Bible teaching series on the whole of Scripture. Last year we looked at Ecclesiastes, Acts and John's Gospel and had a series on Lessons from the Reformation which applied many of those great truths. But it has also meant encouraging private Bible reading and joining home groups and it's been great to see that happening more and more over the last year.

Growing in Likeness to Jesus is about discipleship. I mentioned home groups already, but in the last year the women's work was relaunched, momentum has continued its work and since January I've been running a programme of spiritual formation and basic theology with 11 guys, with the hope that we can roll it out to others in the church from Easter next year.

Growing in number is about evangelism. Over 2017 we ran 3 enquirers courses, spent a lot of time on door to door work, ran an excellent Easter fun day (only bettered by the one this Easter) and put a lot of time and energy into preparing all of us for our MORE mission this February. As a result, the Lord has added to our number those who are being saved. It's a small growth, but it is growth.

Our final G was to be **Glued together as loving community**. In the spring of last year we ran an excellent church weekend at home, we now have more people staying for coffee after the services and from my own observations it feels as if more of us are getting to know more people within the church family as time goes by. Time is vital for that, so let me urge you again to book onto the church weekend away this October if you haven't yet done so. It's a great way of getting to know others better, as well as enjoying some excellent Bible teaching too.

Of course progress in all these areas is not just down to me. We have a huge team of people who serve here at St Nicholas. Most of you will be involved in one way or another and that's right and proper, because there are no passengers in this ship, just crew. And whilst it's right and proper that from time to time we carry those who are in need, and we welcome those who are investigating Jesus without putting any pressure on them to give all serve, for those in the family of God who have made their home here, it is right and proper that we serve.

But I want to thank you for your service. And whether that has been as a church warden or a welcomer, on the kitchen team, on the maintenance team, as a bell ringer, as a musician, as a reader or intercessor or communion server, on the website or facebook, with the sound and AV, as a musician or singer, as someone who leads or helps with our children's and youth work, whether you're on the pastoral team, leading a home group, giving people lifts, praying with people, doing the finances, serving on the PCC or deanery Synod or arranging flowers or vergering at services or helping me with the Sunday preaching and leading or in some other area I've forgotten to mention, all of you who have served have been a vital part in the life and growth of this church over the last 12 months. We also benefitted wonderfully from Dan's

ministry with us until October last year and have had George on the staff team from September. Alison has continued to provide me and the PCC with wonderful admin support, and there are times when I'd hardly be able to function without Judy by my side.

But as I said in my piece in the weekly sheet – nothing any of us have done has been through our own strength. All our gifts and talents, time and money and energy are ultimately gifts from God the great giver. So whilst I am incredibly grateful to all of you for all your efforts this year as partners in the mission of our church, it's God alone who is worthy of our thanks and praise when we see how much has been accomplished.

I know many churches and ministers who would be very satisfied with our size and activity programme and the steady growth we have seen over the last few years, but if I'm honest I'm not one of them. I'm grateful and delighted and somewhat humbled with how things have gone over the last seven years but I'm not satisfied. And I hope you aren't either.

So I want to challenge us today to set our sights higher; let's put our trust more firmly in God and step out in faith and action to reach more of the lost of our town with the gospel of Jesus over the coming years. I want to pick three of our 5Gs and challenge us all to step out in faith and obedience over the coming years.

Glorifying God in all we do. The building! I'll say later more about this later, but let me just say now that the changes we believe are right for the building will be costly in both time and energy. If things go to plan, we'll be out of the church for around 6 months from the start of next year. That will bring a lot more work, increased costs but some wonderful opportunities. To make it a success we will need to work harder and give more generously and without that commitment from the whole church family we will not succeed. But our aim is that we have a church building that allows us to grow and witness more and more in the years to come.

Growing in Likeness to Jesus- discipleship. One of the ways we grow as disciples of Jesus is by **servicing willingly**. Sometimes we get to serve in areas which fire our passions, at other times we serve because there's a need and we can do the job. Right now we desperately need 7 more helpers for our Sunday school classes. You don't need to be able to teach children, you just need to like them and want then to know Jesus better. You'll also need a clear DBS check for kids work. The commitment isn't large – perhaps once every two months – but it will make a massive difference to our kids team. Will you put your discipleship into practice in this way?

The walk of a disciple is also about **giving generously**. Arrie earlier outlined the state of our finances, which, although we have no reserves, are reasonably healthy. Over the last seven years we have been able to invest more in mission activities as well as managing to pay all our bills and for that I am very grateful. But there is more needed, let me give you two extra ways.

As you saw from the new sheet today, July 2019 we will have a new curate amongst us. Although most of their costs are paid centrally and we get a huge amount of help with their housing, having a curate will cost us around £6000 per year. That's money we don't have in the budget right now but that we will need from July 2019.

We would also benefit hugely from a paid children's and families worker to help us nurture our children, build links to our baptism families and reach out into the schools. Mandy and Arrie will, in all likelihood, be leaving Stevenage this year meaning we will need a new treasurer and Bridgebuilders will need a new director. Wouldn't it be great if we could combine those roles and strengthen our staff team at the same

time? Bridgebuilders would be paying most of the salary, but we'd need to find the cost of the hours that person did each week here at St Nicholas. That's likely to be about another £6000 a year – only this time we'd need to it from this September.

Between those two new prospective members of staff, we are looking for an extra £1000 a month in our regular giving. Assuming the people who give pay the basic rate of income tax, that's actually nearer £750 a month, half of which we would need from this September, the other half from next July. I know that's a huge ask, what with the costs of the building developments, but if we want to make a real difference in our town then serving willingly and giving sacrificially have to be part of the deal.

Most of you will be aware that as a church we are in an incredibly privileged position with the Hawkes Trust providing grants that cover almost all repair and maintenance costs. Most churches like ours spend between £10 and £20,000 a year on the buildings. We don't need to do that. When we give it goes to gospel work or changes to the building to make gospel work easier. So I want to challenge us all to prayerfully consider how much we can afford to increase our weekly or monthly giving to make these two additions to our staff a possibility?

The third challenge is cost-free, at least financially. And it's to do with **growing in number**: It's a challenge for each of us to seek to make one new disciple of Jesus over the next 2 years. On your seats this morning there are some prayer cards on which you can write down the names of 3 people you know and see regularly that are not yet Christians. I want to invite you to take it, fill it in and then commit yourselves to pray for them regularly. If you're not sure what you would say, then get yourself ready to talk to them about Jesus by reading some books on evangelism or simple answers to big questions. Over the next few months we will plug some books and run training courses to help us to do that better. But as you get prepared, will you also ask God to give you opportunities to speak to them and pray for boldness when they come.

There are often about 75 adults and 15 children worshipping with us on a Sunday. Wouldn't it be fantastic to be back in this building in 14 months' time with phase 1 of the project finished with 45 new believers? Wouldn't it be amazing to have another 45 the year after that? We may not see that many come to Christ, we may see more, but let's be bolder with our evangelism. That's what church is about. The command of Jesus is that all Christians are to be disciple-making disciples. Let's recognise that and grow into that calling this year.

Serve willingly - Give generously - Witness boldly and do it all for the glory of God. That's our mission. May we follow the footsteps of Jesus and may God build his kingdom here through us as we do.