**Rectors Report for Annual Meeting 2017**

Thank you for coming to this, my 1st Annual Church meeting, and welcome if this is your 1st or 71st or anything in between.

Thank you to Alan for welcoming us to The Heath for our Annual Meeting due to St Marys being closed for the re-decoration. Very different buildings, one seating 100’s and placed in the town centre and the other seats around 50 and is in the heart of the houses. One 100’s years old established parish church and the other a ‘Mission’ church. Although a church was founded here on The Heath in 1869, the present building was built in 1874-5. What matters is that it is an indication of what the Holy Spirit has been doing in people’s hearts here in Uttoxeter, over many generations. Jesus said that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, so I give thanks not just for what has happened but particularly what it means.

Beautiful as they can be, these buildings are not monuments but instruments. They are specialized tools, designed to serve, made to reach those who do not yet come here, so that they may encounter Jesus Christ and new life in him. They are built to change lives.

Since I arrived in Uttoxeter, one priority that has constantly been brought up by members of our parish is the need to bring in new members. Growing a small parish in a small town that is itself growing is a tough enterprise.  Indeed growing any church in any town is tough.  The first thing we need to remember is that it’s not us who make the parish grow, but God.

Now, please don’t think I’m throwing all the responsibility of growing our parish on God.  Actually, I am, but we need to be mindful of the things that God is calling on us to do to work with him.  That’s what the whole Christian life is about: God doing what he does, and us responding in the way which God wants us to respond in order to be the hands and feet of God here on earth.  That’s what you and I are called to be – the body of Christ, carrying on his mission in the world, by his grace. Indeed we end our Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion each week asking God to help us “do all such good works as thou has prepared for us do to.”

In order to be a place where people want to come. In order to be a family that people want to be a part of, we need to have our business in order.  And to have that business in order, we need to be constantly asking ourselves, “Is this what God wants us to do?”  More than any priority which you may think our parish family may have, that must be priority number one. Are we doing what God wants us to do. How we go about doing that is by faithful prayer and reading the bible, and asking God to show us what he is doing and how we can join in.

And I want to invite you today, to join with me in adding to your prayers “O Lord, what would you have us do?”  That was the prayer which Paul offered up when he was confronted with the vision of Christ on the Road to Damascus.  “Lord, what shall I do?”

I’ve been asking that very question myself over the last several months.  What would God have us do as we move toward the future.  I want to share with you a few thoughts which I have discerned.

**Service**

One area which we need to pray about is how can we do more to reach out to our community.  I’ve struggled myself with this very question.  There are a lot of wonderful ministries which God has called other churches to in our town.  Uttoxeter Pentecostal work closely with the youth of the area; URC & Methodists are working in some of our school with a paid children’s worker; some of our clergy and laity are involved in visiting nursing homes with Holy Communion. But I am asking God where does St Marys and The Heath fit into our community.

Within our own parish, too, each of us needs to consider how we can offer service. There are wonderful people in our parish who bear a lot of the work.  We need volunteers to help out with things like welcoming people to our services, serving tea/coffee, reading the bible readings, leading the prayers of the people in intercession, helping with our growing Sunday School, helping with a weekly toddler group.

Please be willing to volunteer or serve when asked by God or prompted by someone. It is God that we are serving – not the Rector or other church members, as when we welcome the stranger or friend we welcome Christ.

**Evangelism**

In the area of Evangelism, we need to get ourselves out there in the public eye more often than we have in the past.  That’s one important thing.  I’m beginning to get recognized around town and want to be a visible part of our community.  That’s going to be an important aspect of bringing new people into our family.  But the biggest and most important and best way to get more people to church is to invite them.  If everyone in the room today, worked this year to invite just person to church this year, we could double the size of our parish.  Who will you try to bring into the church this year? Think of one person, just one and start working on them remembering that the best thing you can to start that process is to start praying for them on a daily basis.  And then start inviting them.

On Ascension Day we will be launching ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ which the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have invited us to be part of. This is us ‘Joining with the family of God the Father to pray ’Come Holy Spirit’, that we may be effective witnesses to Jesus Christ.’ At the heart of ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ is the commitment to corporate and individual prayer. We will be holding prayer times in all our area churches from Ascension Day until the Day of Pentecost, and I will offering individuals, who would like to learn more about personal and/or corporate prayer, some time to discover what is at the heart of prayer, during that time.

**Stewardship**

The final area I want to speak about today is Stewardship.  Stewardship is perhaps the second most important dimension of parish life after Evangelism.  Each of us is called to share the Gospel with others, in intentional ways in our lives, that’s evangelism.  What follows on evangelism’s heels is Stewardship.

Stewardship involves a lot of dimensions.  One of those dimensions is the maintenance of our day to day operations.  You received today a report from our Treasurer.  You’ll see that at the end of the year, we almost made ends meet and most of our bills are paid.  That’s wonderful.  That is a blessing from God. There is along way to go.

One of the things that concerns me is that as you look at the report, only half of our income came from regular giving envelopes.  As we look to the future, we need to have a better understanding of how God wants us to be good stewards of our annual expenses and income. At St Marys through Lent we have been looking at ‘Giving in Grace’. This year, I’m going to be enlisting the help of some of you, and some fellow clergy to help us better understand how we might become better givers in the kingdom of God for our annual budget.

Lastly, as members of our Parish we are responsible for being good stewards of the things we have been given, our buildings being a key component.  We have done a great job over the years of keeping up and maintaining the buildings we have, and being able not just to use them for our own needs, but to offer them up to the community for their needs.  Our ability to be there for our surrounding community is a great blessing to us as well as to the people of Uttoxeter.  Our buildings are used on a regular and continuing basis by local community groups, schools, nurseries and families.  I’m grateful we’ve got the beautiful and functional space to do that.  And as part of our life as a family we’re charged with making sure its available for years to come.

To that end, our PCC has agreed that a small group follow on with ‘Giving in Grace’ programme. In the next few weeks, you’ll be receiving a letter asking you to please consider prayerfully how you will contribute.

I want to end this evening on a personal note.  It’s hard to believe that it’s been 9 months since we were welcomed into the fellowship of Uttoxeter. On behalf of Mark, Luke and Leah thank you!