

EASTER GENERAL VESTRY 2011

Welcome to our Easter General Vestry. This is the 11th Easter Vestry of Holy Trinity and it is difficult to know what is new that can be said, as many of you will have attended each of the previous 10 meetings. I want this evening to look back over the past year and to look forward, which is probably more important.

2010

I want to begin with mentioning the passing of some of our longest members in 2010. I rarely mention individual deaths at Easter Vestry because I am aware, painfully aware, that for those who have lost a loved one it is the most significant event during that year and I do not wish to place one person's passing above another. In 2010 Capt Austin Ardill, and Mr Eric Day went to be with Christ. Eric and Austin were prominent members of our congregation and both played significant roles in our fellowship. There were many other deaths during 2010, Mr Cuming, Karen and Arlene's parents and many other members of the congregation experienced the pain of bereavement. As the rector I want to say that we pray that God in His mercy eases that pain each day.

Harvest Gift day – thank you to everyone who gave sacrificially – it was a blessing and in light of the economic situation it was clear that people had made sacrifices to give so generously. It was a real encouragement to all to hear of such generosity in our church.

Jack Blair – each year I put on record my appreciation of Jack and this year is no exception. Jack is a very able, faithful and godly colleague. I appreciate immensely his sensitivity in leading worship and his quiet pastoral work which goes unnoticed by many but is deeply appreciated and valued by those to whom he has ministered. Quite simply our church fellowship is greatly blessed to have him minister amongst us.

Selwyn and Roger – I want to thank them both for continuing to play the organ to enable us to sing the praises of almighty God. They do so out of a genuine faith in Christ and for His glory. Thank you for your faithful service in this ministry.

The organ had an overhaul last year and the select vestry were informed that it may last 3 months, 3 years or die next week. Whilst we are praying that it lasts more than three years we do need to be aware that at some point we may need to spend a significant sum of money in either replacing it or fixing it. I want to say this publicly, so no rumours start, the organ is not going to be made redundant. We need, especially for funerals etc, a church organ.

Choir – I thank them for their faithfulness and their commitment to leading us in praise at public worship. I think it is fair to say that without them some Sundays there would be silence when it comes to a hymn. Thank you for the strong lead that you give and for serving God in this way. Thank you for your commitment to be here week by week, it is not taken for granted and we want to say how much we appreciate your ministry.

Praise Band – Thank you for enabling us to worship God through new music and new songs. We are blessed to be able to have available such a rich variety of music and song to worship. We are thankful to God that you freely give of your time and talent to serve Christ in this way here at HT.

Wardens – thank you to Bill and Garry for your faithfulness to duty each week. I appreciate all the work that goes on each Sunday morning to ensure that everything is in place for worship to take place. From making sure the sanctuary is ready, communion vessels, the font for baptism (simple things like heating the water which shows attention to detail) etc. I want to thank Billy for maintaining the grounds around HT and I for one appreciated the Victoria plums last autumn.

Rotas – thank you to all who serve on the chair rota, tea rota, welcoming rota and for those who organise those each week. Thank you to Colin McIlwaine who organises the readers and prayer leaders for public worship – this is important as worship is a corporate act and not just for me and Jack to be heard. It is important that different voices are heard and different people get to lead us in intercessory prayer. Please take the step and volunteer to read or lead us in prayer – it is such an encouragement to us all.

Sound desk and laptop – thank you to those who oversee these each week so that we can worship. Technology is great when it works and I thank them for persevering through many trials with the technology. I would put on record that over the next few years we are going to have to upgrade the sound desk – it is being very gently nursed along at the moment and the new select vestry

will need to be aware of the fact that it may need replaced sooner rather than later.

Organisations – Once again I want to publicly thank the leaders of our different organisations, both adult, youth and children. Thank you for your faithfulness to Christ in serving in a leadership role within HT. We are blessed as a church to have leaders who are faithful, godly and consistent in their commitment week by week to serving their Lord by serving others. Many of our youth organisations engage with young people who have little or no church connection and this contact may be the only time that Christ and the things of Christ are mentioned in their lives. We need to constantly and consistently pray for our leaders and to support them and their organisations.

Prayer Team – thank you for your prayer support for this parish, for our ministry and for our spiritual well-being each week. It has been a joy to see this ministry prosper and grow. Many people mention to me how thankful they are for the prayer team and for their ministry amongst us. Thank you for praying for us and with us on a Sunday morning and each Thursday evening. Only eternity will reveal the true value of those prayers but we know, even in a small way, how rich our lives are because of them now. Thank you.

Safe Guarding Trust – there is probably no more thankless task today in a church than being the person who has to oversee this area of church life. I want to thank Sam Skelly for being meticulous in this area of work. I know people complain and find all the forms etc to be irksome, to say the least, but

we have no choice but to comply with the law of the land and the law of the church. Our church insurers have made it clear that if we do not adhere to the SGT rules then if anything were to happen our insurance would be invalidated. SGT is as much about protecting our leaders as it is protecting our children and vulnerable adults. The protection of children and vulnerable adults must be high on our agenda, but equally we need to protect our leaders from any spurious accusations. As you will be aware from the media such accusations can surface many years later and accurate records may one day help the innocent to defend themselves if falsely accused.

Shirley Moffett – I want to put on record the appreciation of the Select Vestry, myself, and the parishioners, to Shirley for her work in keeping this building clean and tidy. I think we all are a little guilty of taking that for granted and we may not fully appreciate the amount of work that goes into keeping this place spic and span. Thank you for your work and faithfulness in serving God in this way.

Hazel and Sandra – thank you for the flowers each week and the special occasions. They remind us of the Creator God whom we worship and they brighten the sanctuary.

Maurice Langley – for putting the magazine together each month.

Drew Buchanan – for sorting out our web page, for the ezine each month and for the podcasts which allow many people to hear the word of God each week.

If there is anyone I have forgotten to thank please accept my apologies, it was not intentional.

Year Ahead

The UK Christian Handbook of Current Trends says that by 2040 there will only be a residual Christian presence in Britain, and that institutional structures will have imploded and disappeared long before that. You might find that hard to believe but I think it is fair to say that even in Northern Ireland the church going statistics show a marked decline in attendance at church each week. We are not immune from such trends. Whilst the first half of 2010 saw our numbers above the 300 each week they fell back during the latter part of the year and have not recovered in 2011. Why? We have not changed anything significantly. I am not sure but I think we do need to look forward and to seek to reengage with those who were once here and are not and also as a church to look seriously at how we engage this community with the gospel. On any given Sunday there are somewhere between 40-70 people missing from our worshipping community. Today, more than ever, there seems to be a lack of commitment to attending worship each week. What really saddens me is that many of those people claim to be followers of Christ Jesus. As a pastor I am concerned with the example that many of our parents are setting for their children with such irregular church attendance. Can I encourage you as a congregation to make a point of noting who is missing and of encouraging them to attend church regularly. It is not just my task to seek out the wandering and the lost, it is the task of us all.

Discipleship – I am aware of people who claim to have made a commitment to Christ but who have never grown in their faith. Part of that lack of growth to maturity is their own fault but part of it has been ours in that we lack a coherent discipleship path for people. Many of our teenagers for example drift away from Christ and the church when they enter 4th form and above. We have started to address this issue by the evenings we spent with the Rev Trevor Johnston on discipleship. Those were extremely helpful evenings and for me as a pastor very enlightening. In the different surveys that we did it has become apparent that we are very weak in the area of pre-evangelism and evangelism – and to that end during the incoming year we are going to seek to create opportunities for people to learn how to share the gospel in a biblically meaningful, relevant and acceptable way. I have listened to the leaders who attended and their desire to create disciples and not to simply run programmes at HT and also for the need for there to be ongoing training for leaders and others to understand and grow in their commitment to Christ. To that end during the next year I will be calling a group together to plan just such a path for Christians in HT to follow and grow as a disciple of Christ.

As part of this discipleship programme we are, along with every other parish in the diocese, going to carry out a parish audit. On the 11th May 2011 we will come together to look at our parish – too look at its SWOT. The bishop has suggested that someone other than the rector facilitate that evening and I have asked Selwyn Black if he would facilitate that evening for us – he has experience of such analysis from his time as a lecturer and also in his present field of work. That evening will be open to everyone in the parish, to all ages, and I would encourage everyone to come along and to add their thoughts,

experience and knowledge to enable us to get a proper understanding of our parish and the community context around us. The information gathered from that evening will be sent to the bishop to enable him to get a picture of the diocese and to plan a diocesan strategy. It will also enable us to plan a way forward as a fellowship – a way that will engage with the community and culture around us and to help those within this fellowship to come to know Christ and to grow in Christ.

Worship – Holy Trinity exists for the worship of Almighty God – that is our first priority, our calling and I pray our hearts desire. The worship of Almighty God is central to everything else that happens here at HT and we should not lose sight of that. Sunday morning as we come together around God's Word and around the Lord's Table it is to praise God for all that He has done for us in Christ Jesus. It is easy, sometimes too easy, in a busy parish like HT to forget that is why HT is here. It is easy, too easy, for us all to get caught up in our own worlds, our own agendas and issues and to forget to lift our eyes up to God and to worship Him. Sunday morning will continue to be the priority of my ministry amongst you. I will continue to seek to enable us all to worship God with the best of our gifts, our abilities and our resources. As you know this year I, after discussion with the Select Vestry, started a 9.30am HC, whilst numbers have been reasonable for something new, it would be good to see them grow.

We have appointed Louise to oversee and develop the music ministry at HT. We are fortunate that we have such a number of musicians in HT but it all

needs co-ordinated and planned and the Select Vestry and I believe that for the good of HT and more importantly for the advancement of the worship of almighty God this appointment was necessary. We want to be able to offer our very best in music and praise to God – nothing less should be our desire and so I ask you all to support Louise, the musicians and the choir with your prayers and in your words as we together seek to worship God.

Carrickfergus – allow me to give you some statistics concerning Carrickfergus.

According to the 2001 census – 36% of children born in Carrickfergus are to single mothers and I suspect that has increased in the past 10 years. 49% of marriages took place in the registry office, again I suspect that statistic has increased. Long term unemployment was 19%, and in light of the economic downturn that is bound to have increased. Some 8% of the population of Carrickfergus live in an economic and socially deprived area, with Northlands being rated the most deprived in Carrickfergus. 14% of the population have a long term debilitating and life limiting illness. 10% of the population are unpaid carers for family members. 8% are lone parents and 4% are lone pensioner households.

How do we reach this community with the good news of Christ Jesus? We do so one relationship at a time. We do it by connecting with people at the school gate, in Tesco's, at the leisure centre, by being good neighbours etc. This is the task of us all and not just the ministry of a few. We all need to recommit ourselves to winning people for Christ. If we believe, as the bible teaches, that people who die without Christ are condemned to a lost eternity and we have

the good news of salvation – why would we not want to share it with them? It is the mission of the Church, of this church. We all need to begin somewhere but we must begin the task of engaging with this community or we are failing Christ and ultimately HT will become irrelevant to the majority of the community. It is easy for us to keep our focus on the inside and to be concerned with the world within HT but Christ, whom we serve and follow, told us to go and make disciples of all nations – to go means that we are sent, we are to go out into the community with Christ. As a church fellowship we need to fan into flame a passion for the lost and to creating a community of faith here which is outward looking, warm and inviting, and relevant to this community. To be other is to fail in obedience to the great commission.

Finally – I want to thank you for allowing me the privilege of being your pastor. I have been in Carrickfergus 18 years, 15 of those years have been spent here at HT, 11 as the rector. It is an immense privilege which I never take for granted. I am all too aware of my failings as a pastor and for those I ask your forgiveness and patience. God works in my life, as He does in yours, to make me more like Christ each day. I hope and pray that you do know that I love you as a people and that my passion is to see you know Christ as Lord and Saviour, to grow deep in His Word and to faithfully follow him in your life – a Bible in your hand, a Saviour in your heart and a Purpose in your life. That is what I am committed to in serving you as your pastor.

Thank you for your prayers and your support. Thank you for loving us as a family and to those who teach Taylor in Potter's House, J Club, Badminton, GB, Uplift as her father I am in your debt.

Thank you for being the people of God and sharing your lives with me as we journey in Christ towards heaven.

Amen.