

Easter Vestry 2017

Good evening everyone and welcome to this Easter Vestry Meeting. This is the 21st Easter Vestry Meeting I have addressed here and the 17th as Rector. As I said last year at this meeting I sometimes wonder if there is anything new to say but it is good to look back over the past year and to give thanks to Almighty God for His faithfulness, love, and blessing upon us as a congregation.

As always at this meeting I want to begin by thanking people for their work during this past year. I want to remind us all that each and everyone is made in the image of God and that we are, all of us, of eternal value. It is important and essential to the life and ministry of this parish that everyone plays a part in the life of this congregation. I hope and trust that you know and that you believe that your contribution to the life of this congregation is as important as anyone who leads from the front or leads an organisation. Without each of you fulfilling your God-given role the work of the kingdom of God would not be advanced in this parish or in this community.

I want to begin this evening by thanking Chris for all his hard work since he came to be a Deacon Intern back in October. It has been a personal blessing to have a colleague work beside me day by day in the life of the parish. Chris has fitted seamlessly in to the life of the congregation and I know his pastoral care, his visiting, his leading of public worship and preaching has been a blessing to many of you within our church family. I would ask that in the remaining months of his placement with us that you take the time to actually thank him in person, be that with a note or a word - but it is important that you do so. Thank you Chris and Andrea for all that you have brought to us since October 2016.

I want to thank Jack for his continued ministry amongst us. His faithful service over the entire life of this parish is a living testimony to his faith in Christ and is a blessing to us all. Personally, I know that many pastoral situations would never be noticed or addressed if it were not for him and his ministry amongst us. I also want to thank Jack for the very gracious, humble and godly way he has taken a slight step back since Chris has been with us and for the manner in which he has been willing to help whenever needed. Personally, it has been a living example of true Christian leadership in action - because it has been about the glory of God and the development of other people's ministries and not about Jack. Thank you Jack.

Billy and Adam - thank you for your work over the past year as wardens. As a ministry team we thank them both for their work in ensuring that everything was ready for worship each Sunday morning. I also have appreciated the cups of tea before the service each Sunday morning and I thank them for insuring that things were done with dignity and reverence at all times. Thank you also to Billy for continuing to keep the grounds of the church looking so beautiful each year.

Louise - I am not sure we all appreciate how much work goes in to the music to lead us in worshipping God each week. Thank you Louise for continually moving us forward as we praise God. To all the musicians and singers, we simply would be at a loss each Sunday without you. It is often only when we go to another church that we truly appreciate what we have in the way of musical ability in this congregation and in Louise co-ordinating it for us. As your rector I find it an immense blessing to have someone who I can implicitly trust to choose songs and hymns that are appropriate, that blend with the Word of God that morning and that are about truly worshipping and praising God and not about showing off the ability of musicians etc. Thank you Louise and music teams.

To all the teams who make Sunday morning possible. Simon and the chair team, Anne and the tea/coffee teams, the welcoming teams, creche, audio visual teams and especially the Prayer Team for their ministry. Thank you to all of you - you add to our worship and enable us to come into a building that is prepared for praising God.

Shirley Moffat - thank you to Shirley for all the hard work in keeping this building clean and tidy. I am not sure that we all realise that several hundred people use this building every week. That takes a lot of work to keep the place clean and tidy. Thank you Shirley.

Leaders of all the organisations - thank you for your continued commitment and dedication to serving Christ by serving us in your leadership roles. Sarah Bell (Nelson) will step down this year as GB captain and Colin Watson will also step down as BB captain. I want to thank them both for their work in both these organisations over many years and especially the last few years as they have carried the heavy burden of being captain. I have already met with the GB officers to discuss the way ahead for our GB company. Mrs. Irene Moffett has agreed to act as a mentor to the officers for the coming year and to share her experience to enable them to put a programme together for the year ahead. I have also

spoken to one of the BB officers who is considering taking on the role of Captain and again I have asked Drew Buchanan to mentor them in the year ahead as they take on this responsibility. Please continue to pray for these organisations. I think it was good to have the GB and BB enrolments as part of our morning worship and that will continue this year.

SEED/LIGHT - these two organisations play an important and vital role in the life of this church. They teach and model the gospel of Christ to our children and young people. they sometimes can feel forgotten as they do not have enrolment services or displays. Please remember to pray for the leaders and teachers of these organisations. I have often said the most important gift we give our children and young people is a love for Christ and His Word.

Vision Team - I want to say a particular thanks to the Vision Team for the past year. It has been such a blessing to share planning and seeking where God would have us walk as a parish with this group of people. It is such a blessing and a more biblical model of leadership than one man making all the decisions. I think we would all agree that their initiatives for social get togethers, for outreach (such as Messy Church, the Light Festival) has been a real blessing to us all as a congregation. It was a blessing to join with JVC in the Christmas Lantern Light Festival and I think we all agreed it was worth the effort and people have spoken that they hope it becomes an annual part of our Christmas celebrations.

On Messy Church - it would be good if more people became involved but what is equally as important. We need as a congregation to start inviting non-church families to come to Messy Church and to actually come along with them. Please take this on board. I really fear that the majority of the congregation never actually think of inviting anyone to Church or to Messy Church. That mindset has to change if we are to grow numerically and spiritually as a congregation. If we believe, as we say we do, that Christ is the Saviour of the world and that people are lost without Him - then we do not truly love them if we do not invite them to come and hear about Him.

Visiting Team - thank you to the team of visitors who faithfully carry out pastoral visits to people who need visiting more often. I know from conversations with the people visited and with you as visitors there is a real benefit in this ministry and we look forward to it continuing to grow in the years to come. It is important that we all see and take seriously

our responsibility as part of the body of Christ to care for one another - both formally and informally. I know over the past year many of those visits have been of a tremendous blessing to those who are housebound or who are lonely. Only eternity will truly reveal the extent of that ministry.

Flower Team - thank you, the flower arrangements and harvest decorations etc make a difference. Thank you for all the hard work and I know it is not for your own glory but for that of Christ.

Fellowship Cafe - has gone from strength to strength and is an essential part of the life of our congregation and a wonderful means of reaching people. Thank you for not only the fellowship offered each week but also for the generosity of the people who attend in giving each week - that has enabled the Cafe to support many worth causes throughout the year. It has been a great ministry and long may it continue to be blessed and used by God in this place. As I shared on Sunday past the giving has totalled £10K. That is truly amazing, thank you.

Select Vestry - thank you for all your hard work over the past year. Thank you for the continued maintenance of the buildings and of the Rectory. I want to say a special thanks to Drew as Treasurer for carrying an increasingly heavier burden due to the introduction of Charity Legislation etc. Thank you also for your ongoing support and your pastoral care and concern for the rectory family.

Safeguarding Trust - thank you to Pauline McCauley and Jenny Gibson who have taken on the responsibility for this important legal requirement in our church life. I know that in the past year they have worked tirelessly to get all the records up to date. I have to say with some disappointment that in recent weeks they have come to me to say that this task is being slowed because of lack of compliance by people. This only adds to the work of what has been a time consuming work. At times I know it can seem like a herculean task but the end is in sight and this is a vital ministry in our congregation. We often hear of horror stories from the past of vulnerable adults and children who were abused, or leaders falsely accused. It is the protection of the vulnerable and the safeguarding of our leaders against false accusations that this is implemented. I know at times we can feel overwhelmed by it but it is a necessary work and I ask you all to support them in this ongoing work. The new Select Vestry may well have to address the issue of non-

compliance with SGT procedures. Let me make it very clear, so no one is in any doubt, failure to complete the paperwork, to be AccessNI checked and to keep up to date records means that you are not SGT compliant and if anything should happen you, as an individual and as an organisation, will not be covered by the Church public liability insurance. Further, I as the rector and the Select Vestry will have no choice but to ask people to stand aside or down until the necessary regulations are complied with. I know that sounds harsh but we cannot, in any way, flout these regulations. So I am asking all leaders and all organisations to assist Jenny and Pauline in every way to get our records up to date and accurate and to keep them so.

In September-December session we ran the Christianity Explored course. Whilst numbers were reasonable I have to say not many in the congregation came on board. Those who did enjoyed the opportunity to explore their faith and to do so in a relaxed, safe and affirming environment. It was also good to see people bringing friends along, fringe members and non-members of the church. SEED have been running the course with our young people and we look forward to having some feedback from them about its impact with the youth. It is something that we will look to do again in the near future.

Uganda 2017 - what can I say about this? Your generosity has been amazing as we heard last Sunday from Carol. We set a target of £25K in the year and hit that target well before Christmas. If you looked at the notice board on the way in this evening you will see that the sum raised is now in excess of £32K and this does not count the money paid by the team itself for their air fares, accommodation, food and travel whilst in Uganda in the summer. Please continue to pray for Carol and David and the team as they continue in their preparations for Uganda 2017.

Sunday morning worship. At this meeting in 2016 I said the following: It is with some sadness that I share the following with you. On any given Sunday morning there is always between 60-100 people missing from the congregation. It is not always the same people and I know in speaking to you I am speaking to people who are committed but we need to

seriously address this issue. There has crept in to Holy Trinity over the past few years a very laissez faire attitude to commitment, especially to being present with God's people on the Lord's Day. I am at a loss as to why this is so but it is definitely a feature of this congregational life.

I have to say that attitude has continued and the knock on effect of it has been seen in our youth organisations as well. Lack of commitment from parents, children and young people has left our leaders often feeling their efforts are in vain. I want to assure them that this is not the case. Whilst we would love greater numbers in all our organisations we continue to be concerned for the spiritual welfare and destiny of those that God has blessed us with each week.

I think as a congregation, we need to be serious about praying for and supporting our organisations and its leaders. To that end I am going to ask the new Select Vestry to appoint two vestry members to liaise with each organisation within our church fellowship. Their responsibility will be to visit on a regular basis that organisation, to pray for the leaders and members and to regularly through the parish magazine, prayer notices, and other social media bring information to the wider church concerning that organisation. We need each other and we need to support and encourage one another.

Whilst Chris and I have regularly visited homes in this parish I am going to ask the new Select Vestry to look at the possibility of a parish visitation evening/information evening. I have a few initial thoughts on how this would work but the hope is to engage in a meaningful way with every family connected to Holy Trinity - and not just those who attend on a Sunday morning or who are listed on our database but on those who have children and young people in our organisations and adults who attend in any capacity each week. This may take the form of inviting groups of them to a meal to hear about Holy Trinity and what we are about. Again this is for the new Select Vestry and Vision Team to work out in more detail.

Also, at our Harvest Celebration this year I plan to ask each organisation within the church to decorate an area of the church. I also plan to have a harvest supper on the Saturday evening creating more of a weekend celebration of God's good gifts to us.

This is a triennial year when we elect some extra posts in our parish and the wider church. One of the most important will be parochial nominators. I have been here 24 years, which is longer many rectors stay in any congregation. I have no plans to leave but I think it only fair to say that there is always the possibility that God would call me to go somewhere else and therefore the people you elect to the post of nominator will serve for the next three years and may well be called on, with the bishop and diocesan nominators, to select a new rector. So please think carefully about who you elect to those positions this evening. As I said I have no plans to move but even the rest of this day is not promised to me.

On a very personal note - I have been invited by the Anglican Leadership Institute to spend the month of September with other Anglican leaders from around the world in the USA. The majority of those attending are usually bishops from different parts of the Anglican Communion. Those invited are orthodox in their belief and faith and this is seen as a means of supporting leaders in parts of the Communion that may be facing difficult times ahead. It is only one person from each province of the Communion that is invited and I have been invited from the Church of Ireland. I have, after consulting the Bishop and the Select Vestry, decided to accept that invitation and so I will be taking a month sabbatical in September to attend this leadership conference. The conference has classes each day, lectures, case studies, pastoral training and also allows orthodox Anglicans to create supportive networks beyond our own provinces. A month may seem a long time for a conference but many of the delegates will have travelled from Africa, Middle East and Asia and Australia. Also the lecturers and speakers are internationally recognised theologians and many CEO's of multinational companies are also guest speakers. Personally I was humbled to be asked to attend.

The diocese and the bishop have a system for clergy who have served in the diocese for a long period to take 3 month sabbaticals. Several clergy in the diocese have done so and this is my sabbatical - but only for a month and not for three. I will of course organise for pastoral care to be covered and for the Sunday worship to be conducted whilst I am in the USA in September.

Finally, thank you all for your prayers and your words of encouragement over the past year. I shared in Sunday worship recently something of the personal journey I have been on this year. It has been at times difficult, humbling, challenging, distressing but through it

all I have known God's presence and amazing healing touch. I would not claim that I am in any way the finished article but would humbly say 'a work in progress.' Janet will not thank me for saying this publicly but without her constant love, wisdom and support I simply would not have made it through the past year. Thank you also to those in the congregation, especially the prayer team, who prayed each week for me as I went through this year. Thank you for keeping confidential what I had shared with you and for your prayerful support. Again without it I would not have gotten through this past year. The reason I shared in Church a little of the past year was to say it is okay not to be all sorted and to ask for help. We are sometimes very reluctant to do that. I know I was but I am glad I did and I am thankful to a godly Christian counsellor who has helped me on the road to healing and wholeness of life and spirit. I am not going to say any more about this but to thank you all for respecting what I said and for not talking about it outside of Sunday worship. That in itself was a treasured gift from you all. Thank you.

It is an immense privilege to serve Christ as rector of this parish. Thank you for your love and care to us as a family. Taylor is a typical 16 year old but I am delighted that she has so many good role models here in Holy Trinity and so many people that she trusts and who love and support her.

I am sure there are some people I have overlooked, please forgive that oversight. Thank you for listening.

Amen.