

Easter Vestry Address 2016

Good evening everyone and welcome to this Easter Vestry Meeting. This is the 20th Easter Vestry Meeting I have addressed here and the 16th as Rector. 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 everyone of us is valued, important and essential to the life and ministry of this parish. I hope you believe that your contribution is as important as anyone who leads from the front or leads an organisation. With all of you the work of the kingdom of God would not be advanced in this parish or in this community.

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.

Sharon and Adam - thank you for your work over the past year as wardens. Adam has agreed to remain my warden for another year. Sharon is stepping down after 3 years and 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.

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, singers and choir - 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 of 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.

To all the teams who make Sunday morning possible. The chair team, tea/coffee teams, 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 over 1000 people use this building every week. That takes a lot of work to keep the place clean. 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.

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 the burden of planning and seeing 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 their initiatives for social get togethers, for outreach (such as Messy Church) has been a real blessing to us all as a congregation. 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 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.

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. Tomorrow morning is number 100 and we pray God will continue to bless all those involved and those who come along to share fellowship together.

Select Vestry - thank you for all your hard work over the past year. The replacing of the audio/visual system has made a huge difference to worship on Sunday morning, the staging has been very effective when used. 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.

Safeguarding Trust - thank you to Pauline McCauley, Jenny Gibson and Audrey Moffatt who have taken on the responsibility for this important legal requirement in our church life.

Looking Forward

October we will be welcoming Rev Chris St John as a deacon intern as he completes his final year of training for ministry at CITI. Chris will be here a few days each week and most Sunday's for a year. I hope we will make him and his family welcome and in case you are wondering - it is cost neutral to us as a parish - we are providing a place for his final year of training.

In the September-December session we hope (DV) to run Christianity Explored course. This will not happen if you do not get involved. It will not happen if you do not begin now praying for it and about it. Building relationships with people to invite to the course. Being prepared to help with catering, welcoming and participating in the course yourself. You will hear more about this as the year goes on but put it on your prayer list now.

Christmas outreach - we plan a community carol service, christmas evening, in December. Our initial thoughts are for a lantern parade, carols at Hoy Trinity - some sort of christmas food and a presentation of the meaning of Christmas to the local surrounding community.

Again - this will not happen without you, without your prayers and your commitment to be involved.

Uganda 2017 - we had a good turn out on Sunday evening past for the information evening. The vision team believe that we are in a place as a church to reach out to a community in Uganda and to help them. Out of our wealth to help a school in Gulu, Northern Uganda, to build a kitchen. The cost of the total project is £25000. It may sound a lot but it isn't really and we are asking you all to put your shoulder behind this project both in prayer and in financial support. Carol and David Mulligan will be leading that team and if you want more information please speak to them.

Sunday morning worship. 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 know from conversations with other clergy the same is true for others. I have to say I go from anger to despair over this some weeks. There are people who put a lot of effort in to coming week by week - overcoming personal difficulties to be here and then there are those who stay away for the most spurious of reasons. I can only conclude that their love for Christ is dying. To be honest the apathy in their relationship to and with Christ is very clear and if unaddressed they will eventually walk off into the world and away from Christ. As a coal taken from a fire eventually goes cold so will you/they if they/you are not in fellowship each Sunday with the people of God. It must be a priority - above all other things in our lives. Christ is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. You may think that I am being harsh here but as your pastor I will one day give an account for my ministry amongst you, an account that you will not be called to give, and so I am bound by my commitment as your shepherd under Christ to call you home again from the wandering ways that you seem destined to go.

Please continue to pray for the wider Church of Ireland - we genuinely are headed for difficult times over the next year or so. General Synod this year will receive proposals to change diocesan boundaries which will have an impact on us all, not least financially. The

Select Committee on Human Sexuality is due to report and knowing several people on that committee there is no real consensus as to a way forward and the usual anglican fudge may well be proposed. You may not be aware but a second Church of Ireland cleric has entered a civil partnership in the South and that adds further pressure to the situation. Prior to Christmas the clergy received a letter from their bishop which basically said that if people wait then eventually change will come to the church in accepting same-sex relationships and marriage. I personally wrote to my bishop outlining my opposition and disappointment that we should have received such a letter, especially a few days before Christmas. Can I say the issue at the heart of all of this is the authority of Scripture in the Church. Do we believe and are we prepared to be out of step with culture, that what the Bible says is sin is sin and must be repented of and turned away from. Can I say again, as I have often said in the past - no one is without sin and all are welcome at Holy Trinity. Their lifestyle choice may make us uncomfortable but we will love them as Christ loves them and we will seek with all our heart and strength to bring them to Christ that He might forgive them and save them, as He has done with us.

Finally, thank you all for your prayers and your words of encouragement over the past year. 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 15 year old but I am delighted that she has so many good role models in GB, SEED and here on a Sunday morning - thank you for that.

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

Amen.