

APPENDIX 2

Chairman's Report

In previous years, I have talked about what the most important number at an Annual Church meeting is. It's not the numbers on the Electoral Roll report, the accounts, or the number of PCC members that we need to elect. It's the number of people living in our parish.

If we don't remember any other number from this evening, this is the number to remember. 15,000. That is the number of people in this area that we are responsible, as the parish churches, for sharing the good news of Jesus with.

There are however a few other numbers that I thought that I would share with you this evening, some that we can celebrate and some which might challenge us.

The first thing to celebrate is that our worshipping community, the number of people who worship in one of our congregations at least once a month has grown again, and is now around 440 people. The percentage of youngsters, those under 18 in that worshipping community has been growing as well, it has risen from 13% in 2015 to 19% last year. This compares with 21% of the population of Wellington being under 18, which is pretty close. This is a real testament to the work being led by Susie and Abby amongst children, schools and families, details of which are in the reports in your packs. We are growing younger as a church, which is brilliant, and gives us some fantastic opportunities.

Earlier this week we had the funeral of one of our long standing church members, Margaret Swain. As people were sharing their memories of her, many of them were about her as their Sunday school teacher, or Guide leader, and what a positive impact she had on their lives.

We have that opportunity now. We have more and more youngsters in our church life, we have more and more schools work developing. We can be the people that these youngsters look back on as the people who taught them and disciplined them, who showed them Jesus' love for them. If you'd like to be part of this, to have this legacy, then please talk to Susie or Abby about how you can get involved.

More challenging is the fact that about 16% of our electoral roll is aged 18-44, compared to 32% of the population. This is a gap that challenges us. The visit of Phil Knox from the Evangelical Alliance gave us some thought starters for how we might engage more effectively with people in this age group, but there is work to be done here.

As some of you will know, we have been working in the office to move to some new membership software which is helping us to improve our pastoral care and to streamline our administration. As we were entering the information of the people who are on the Blue Rota, who fulfil various roles in our services, I was pleasantly surprised to find that there were over 80 people involved. When you add in all those who have other ministries around

the church, it is so good to realise how many of us take an active role in the life of the church.

I worked out another couple of numbers that surprised me pleasantly when I was doing a bit of work for the Mission and Discipleship Action Group and realised that we currently have sixteen small groups of one kind or another, with 29 leaders, and about 140 members. There is a great deal of learning together, prayer, and pastoral care that these groups enable that is encouraging. At this meeting last year I talked about the launch of the Action Groups, and particularly about their importance in supporting the many small groups of different types across the church – and particularly in revitalising those that had got into a “holding pattern”.

I am really grateful to those who have been the pioneering initial chairs and members of the Action Groups. It has been an interesting journey as we have taken the idea from the paper that it was formulated on and found out together what it means in practice.

In your packs you have reports from each of the Action Groups about what they have been up to, and some of the triumphs and challenges that have been faced.

I'd like to spend a bit of time now drawing out some of the highlights from these reports. Please do take them away and read them thoroughly and pray for those who serve on these groups as we go into the next year. If you would like to get involved in any of these groups, then please do talk to members of the groups. The Pastoral Care and Hospitality Action Group has developed a new “refreshments” team, distinct from the Sunday morning refreshments team that has been a really invaluable resource that has drawn new people into an opportunity to exercise their ministry of hospitality, and has improved the coordination and organisation of hospitality at different events. On the pastoral care side, the group identified a pastoral care need – to help people talk about death and dying, found a possible initiative to help meet this need, ran a successful pilot of the resources, and are now planning to roll it out into the community.

The biggest highlight from the work of the Fabric, Finance and HR Action Group was the great news that we have already talked about of us ending up with a small financial surplus last year. We are very grateful to God and to all those who gave, and continue to give, towards the work of this parish. Most of the buildings projects that we have been working on have been frustratingly slow. We do believe that there is good missional potential in the changes we want to make, but the process of navigating the bureaucracy involved in making changes in a building like All Saints can be difficult.

The Worship and Prayer Action Group has been encouraged by training for the prayer ministry team, and some new initiatives encouraging our prayer life being developed. It has also been great to see our mixed economy of seven different congregations flourishing and being fruitful, whilst maintaining strong links with each other. The work on the proposed Organ restoration has been taken on by a small team which is making good progress on a big project.

As the different congregations grow, and as we think through how we can reach out to those missing generations, how we develop our worship and prayer life is going to be critically important in the coming years.

The Mission and Discipleship Action Group has been excited to see the positive growth coming from a number of initiatives such as the Alpha courses, Wonderfully Made, Experience Easter, and the Ironmen ministry. The agreement to partner with Orbit to provide a venue in the town centre for us to be able to run courses and events in has the potential to provide us with a step change in our engagement with the community.

One of the reasons that we developed the Action Groups was to allow the PCC to focus more on the vision and strategic direction of the parish. The big piece of work that we did this year was to think about what our values are. We started exploring this at our PCC away day last summer, and continued to reflect and refine through the autumn before sharing our thinking with the congregations at the beginning of the year.

These values link in with and support our purpose and vision.

We believe that we are called to be closer to Christ, and sent to be closer to others.

We see the generous riches of God pouring into this church, a beacon of light, overflowing to the community around us.

We see a Christ centred church of faithful service, intimate worship, and friendship with God. We see a connected community of fruitful congregations, sharing the same DNA, growing in a variety of contexts.

As we live out our purpose, and work towards our vision, we aim to live by these values.

Loving God, we value having hearts for Jesus, being expectant to meet with God, doing our best for God, being rooted in the Bible and prayerfulness.

Loving our neighbours we value being accepting and welcoming, hospitality, sharing faith, reconciling people to each other and to God, making disciples.

Loving each other we value forgiving, humility, kindness, being encouraging, listening, talking to each other and not about each other.

Exploring, we value being Spirit led, openness, being innovative, risk taking, creativity, and being able to rethink and shift.

Celebrating, we value joyful worship, noticing what God is doing, giving thanks to God, showing appreciation, and being generous. Some of these values I believe are already pretty well embedded and lived out. Some I think we will have to work on expressing more fully. As I was going through them, I expect that each of us were having our own ideas and thoughts about where the gaps are.

As we seek to live out these values together, I see three challenges.

The first challenge is to recognise and hold on to what is good, to celebrate it, without minimising what needs to change.

The second challenge is like the first, but flipped on its head. It is to recognise what needs to change, without losing sight of all that is good and that we can celebrate.

The third challenge sits in the middle and involves finding ways of talking about what we disagree on. What happens when some of us think that we doing well on one of our values – say “doing our best for God” and others think that we’re not living it out faithfully. How do we have that conversation without falling out? I don’t fully know the answer to how we meet these challenges. I’m sure we’ll get it wrong at times, but I trust that if we listen carefully, make generous assumptions, and prefer each other, then that will be a good start.

So, as we look forward to the coming year, and seek to live out our purpose, vision, and values what have we got coming up?

Well, there is loads. From our normal yearly round of Midsummer fayre, harvest, confirmations, Alpha courses, Christmas, Easter to the building projects, pastoral initiatives, worship development, the Organ restoration project and other things being headed up by the Action Groups.

But I would like to focus on one in a bit more detail to conclude this evening. As you’ll see from Nick’s report the Orbit is nearly ready to open. We have already invested in this financially, and in Nick’s time and energy in building relationships with the management team.

When we first were planning to appoint a parish mission enabler, and again last year at this meeting I posed a couple of questions, the answers to which are going to be critical for the success of our engagement with the community through the Orbit project:

Firstly: Are we ready and willing to accompany Nick? We’ve appointed someone to come and work with us, to train us up, to be our guide, not to do it all (or even most of it) for us.

Secondly: Are we ready and willing to change? As Nick’s insights into how we can reach out to the local community develop, he might suggest that we need to change the way we do things. Are we willing to do that?

It is now rubber hits the road time. We need to engage positively with this opportunity, to accompany and support Nick, and that might mean change, it might mean stopping some of things we are doing currently.

I know that there have been folk here at All Saints who have wanted us to have a town centre presence for some years.

On Saturday morning we will be meeting at the Orbit building at 9:30 to pray around the building and to explore the next steps in making the most of this opportunity. We have the possibility of a step change in our engagement with our community. Let’s take it.