

Report to PCC – 40 days prayer breakfast

The breakfast meeting was to bring together 12 people taken from congregation and PCC structure. Each person had been given responses to the 40 days which came in the form of scripture, interpretation of scripture, prayer, word and graphical pictures and worship. It has been an amazing experience of God speaking through so many different people bringing to focus key issues. The ongoing discernment process will discover the fruitfulness of this united prayer.

The discussion began with a question as to what was missing from the responses. E.g. church governance / structures, meetings and specific references to finances. What was obvious was that God had spoken to many about similar concerns and themes.

There were five main themes that came from the 40 days of prayer:

1 A fresh start:

Much of the prayer response pointed to God wanted to encourage and affirm where we are but also to give opportunities for a fresh start. There is a sense that God is beckoning his church from 'winter' to a new 'springtime'

- To come in penitence for where we have not listened to God and to know his release from the past
- To trust God in friendship with him – more so to know what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ – heirs and co-heirs
- To re-focus our lives so that Jesus becomes our passion and all that we are passionate about is subordinated to our relationship with Jesus
- To gladly receive refreshing, living water – the Holy Spirit. Soaking!
- To get on with God's purpose – not missing the opportunity
- To rededicate ourselves to God and see his fruitfulness develop in our church community

The way forward

To create opportunities to deepen our spiritual lives and to be accountable to our faith. This must mean as individuals and as a church community we must passionately offer all that we are in the service of God. This to be worked out in our personal relationship with Jesus, in our homes, work places and so on. There is a sense of urgency that God wants to 'do' at Christ Church and we need to be open to his desire.

2 The church building:

God has given us a great building. It has versatility and is widely used by the community. There were voices of concern about how the buildings identity and how it is used.

- The initial response from the 40 days was focused on the chapel and how this important 'holy space' was cut off from the main worship area and most used community space.
- The need for a quiet space which remains connected into the building
- A place where people may come during any time of the day and when other activities are going on
- A place of prayer into the building
- When hirers use the building, in what sense do they understand holy space? Is Christ Church identified as a community building which is sometimes used as a church or a church which loves to welcome the community.
- The main space looks more like a store room!
- The main space has no obvious place to be quiet and reflect.
- The building does not seem to give a sense for its purpose
- Holy space has to be created
- There is no sense of 'static glory' or at least it is not obvious
- The most obvious 'Holy space' is the chapel which is hidden from view.
- Breaking down dividing walls between the chapel and main space

- The church space should have some greater sense of Christian symbolism especially in the context of prayer and the rhythm of prayer in the church.
- The Holy table should be dressed – JC already looking at this but only in denominational format.

The way forward

We share our building and so any considerations as to how we may develop or reconfigure the space would need to be a shared enterprise.

- *An initial discussion at the Churches Together Working Group to share the 40 days of prayer responses*
- *Following this, a proposal to the Joint Council that a consultation evening is held (or a survey is sent out) for anyone interested from both Churches can say what they like / dislike about the building, what could be improved, any issues in running the building etc.*
An ideas gathering exercise but not asking for solutions. A small group could then work up a development plan for the building. Judith Cronshaw has offered to either lead or work with the group to produce sketch ideas. From this, some proposals would be Joint Council led financed by both Churches, some would be PCC led possibly financed from bequests, some could happen quickly, others planned for over a number of years.

3 The church community:

Acts 2.42 and following brings a clear agenda for ‘transformative God shaped’ community.

God wants us to be a community that clearly and passionately displays his presence in our lives. How can we empower this? Do people who come to worship experience God’s warmth? It has been noted:

Abbeyfields seem to have community but no building. We have a building but how much community?

Without a strong, vibrant and lively core community, how can we be attractive to the fringe of church and beyond? Do we trust and desire the image of Godly community – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Involved, Loving and totally dependent trinity!

The way forward:

- *Create opportunities for hospitality to get to know each other better*
- *Deepen our commitment to home groups and meeting together*
- *Create opportunities for fun together*
- *Create opportunities that bring welcome and warmth from the centre to the fringe*
- *To have a vision for fellowship, rededicating our lives to one another and to God*
- *To have an inside out mentality*

4 The church at prayer

In many ways we are already the church at prayer. However the 40 days reflection brought a number of new ideas.

- The creation of a prayer space – this is reflected in the buildings part of the 40 days response
- Soaking prayer over the church, wider community and individuals. Seeking and being in God’s presence to experience his transforming love and power at work.
- The building up of prayer and prayer opportunities.
- Making prayer an obvious focus for the church and its life together. That is creating opportunities in the daily routine, cycle, rhythm of life.
- To use our prayer information leaflets, web pages more effectively
- The use of virtual prayer on the website
- The introduction of Evening or late prayer
- Teaching and training intercessors – those who not only pray at services but also spend significant time in intercession for the church, its people and community

The way forward

- *Teach about prayer to raise awareness and fundamental importance. If it is at the top of God's agenda, Bishop Stephen's agenda, it should be at the very top of ours too.*
- *The creation of prayer or quiet space is covered above. The chapel will be a good place to start or a space within the main space.*
- *Review prayer opportunities and establish who would want to join soaking / intercessory prayer groups / teams.*
- *Review prayer information*
- *A prayer tree or other place where people from the hirer and church community can place their prayers – needs, thanksgivings etc.*

5 The church and unity

We are all believers together! There are many constituencies in the church space. Anglican, United Reformed, Sunday people, weekday people and so on.

- How do we bring people together to a more unified yet naturally diverse community shape.
- Prayer together and apart has highlighted that we are a fellowship sharing the same interest yet coming from many places
- Is God worried about difference?
- Is our over preoccupation with unity that we forget that diversity is at the heart of the Trinitarian nature of God. i.e. this is about relationship which compliments not seeks to be identical.
- Prayer has given opportunity to share together, unified in common purpose.

The way forward

- *We need a fresh understanding of 'unity'. We do need unity of strategy and policy – bringing together similar elements to create a more coherent and uniform approach to mission and ministry.*
- *We need to encourage acceptance of diversity within the churches together and support/encourage the differences which shape our church life, space and so on.*

These responses and reflections are offered for further discernment and action. The way forward is an invitation for us to eat of the fruit of 40 days (and more) of our labours.

We commend these and all other thoughts, prayers, nudges from God as he continues to encourage us. Let he or she who has ears listen!

1 Peter 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4:and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you,

5:who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6:In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7:These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8:Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

9:for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Paul, Jackie, Bill, Sheila, John, Brian, Rod, Katherine, Glyn and Judith

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