

Minister's Report Chepstow Methodist Church 31st AGM 2011-03-30

It is a privilege to be presenting my second report to the AGM during which I hope to affirm and give thanks for much that God is doing and share something of what God is asking of us at this time. It is not possible to say everything, not least because there has to be space for God to surprise us!

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who works so hard and in so many ways for God in this church. I am wary of singling out individuals, however let me take this opportunity to thank Graham for all he is doing as our senior steward and Angela for her collegiality and hard work with the family focus project.

It is good news that our church provides a wide range – or mixed economy – of worship styles. Hopefully this means that many people are able to bring their offering of praise to God. Our two Sunday and weekly mid-week worship combine with monthly as well as occasional bi-lingual, Taize and healing services. It is good news that we have started a new initiative rooted in worship – extended communion through which people unable to attend can share in the Sacrament. I hope we can continue to provide these acts of worship and that we might always strive to enrich worship experiences in this place. Furthermore that we should remember that worship is first and foremost for God and also for those who do not yet attend and not just for those who do! To this end I want to encourage the church to work hard at creating acts of worship that connect with folk who are interested in faith but do not identify with established patterns. To this end we are reflecting on our monthly encounter service and also how we might build on the strength of messy church.

It is good news that we have a range of church groups. Fellowship gatherings with an element of prayer and worship, of a variety of shapes and sizes are very important. It is good news that our guild and women's fellowship are more than 'holding their own' in an era when such groups are often struggling and I am thank full to their respective leaderships. It is also good news that we have a Monday morning study group (with crèche!) In addition to house groups and would like to encourage people to join such groups if they have not already done so.

I am pleased that over the last 10 months we have started a regular prayer gathering called Breath(e) in which we are exploring prayer together. It is also good news that we have established the sanctuary as a prayer room during lent in addition to the time of 24/7 prayer in September. I would like us to become ever more people of prayer who collectively and individually cultivate a sense of God's presence and a trust in the Holy Spirit.

It is a cause for rejoicing that we share with churches together in running the Alpha course and that through this people are coming to faith. Alleluia. It is also important that we are always looking to share the gospel in meaningful ways to a complex and changing society. To this end it would be good to consider what other courses and initiatives we might offer.

Also as part of churches together it is good news that Street Pastors is taking off. This is a reminder of the importance of working together in service of our local

community. Wouldn't it be good if it was the churches that become known as the place to call upon for help with social issues – for help with drug proofing your kids, with debt problems, with resources to strengthen marriages and families? Some of this work is already under way – is God asking for more?

As a church with a heart to serve it is good news that our premises are well used everyday of the week – from youth work and BB to lunch clubs for older people. I have been asking for some time now who else might we serve? Who are those on the margins of society in our town who need space? Increasingly we are aware of the challenged presented by the reality of dementia in its various forms. Are we being asked to work in this area? I am also grateful that our church releases its minister one morning a week to serve amongst some of societies most lost and broken through prison ministry.

It is good news that this church generated over £12,000 in the last 12 months for a range of charities and we should rejoice in generosity. The gospel is about giving and also it is about justice. To this end it is good news that we are active in fair-trade and Christian aid week. It would be good to become even more active in such areas and build a reputation as a campaigning church. This agenda for justice is shown through increasing concern for creation as demonstrated in our aim to become an eco-congregation with such initiatives as the food co-op.

We should be wary of targets and measurement of 'success' with regards to the work of God since it is beyond human means and understanding to see as God sees. However sensible goals can help us focus our priorities. To this end over the next year (and this is by no means exhaustive) I would like to see:

- a small group take on and complete the challenge of installing solar panels
- build momentum in our work with men
- achieve eco-congregation status
- continue our trend of reducing the average age of worshippers(not necessarily on Sundays)
- draw more young adults into our church life
- establish a ministry that serves the marginalised
- offer a course complementary to Alpha

All of these activities take a lot of personnel and one issue we face is that people are increasingly unable to offer the time and commitment a busy church needs. Anybody who feels inspired to join in with the work let me know! I want to emphasise the importance of having a culture that nurtures talent. Where many people do a few things but also one where it is OK to stop doing things! Above all being is more important than busyness and how we do things is as important as what we do. We have to be so careful that we don't lose each other or God in all our busyness.

I will end on a personal note. I was due a sabbatical this year however decided to delay since the circuit has been a minister short. We plan to take it next year and hope to visit Kenya to see the exciting work of the triangle project.

It is an honour to serve God in this church, to lead worship, preach and celebrate the sacraments. Much of my role is also to support and encourage those who do so much

of the work. A key feature of being a minister is availability and important within this is being available to those whom God has entrusted to me. To this end I am grateful for the warmth that surrounds our family in this place and the care people show. I also am thankful for your understanding that family is the most important ministry any of us have and this has to be a priority for us all.

As individuals and a church let us do and also be the best we can as together we trust God and follow Jesus