



Rector's APCM Report

25th April 2010

The one word that sums up the last year for me in St Leonard's is Generosity. It has been a year of extraordinary generosity from you and from God. This is all the more exceptional because in the wider world this year has been a difficult one. We have had a long and hard winter. The recession has meant that a number of you have

lost your jobs or seen your incomes fall. Yet in spite of all this giving to the church, in financial terms has gone up nearly 10% compared to last year. The giving we have experienced has gone far beyond the financial however. People have also given of their time and talents in a wide variety of ways. There as has also been a generosity of attitude to one another that speaks powerfully of the Kingdom of God.

Behind this spirit of generosity there has been a growth in faith. The PCC have spent a lot of time thinking about how we can help all the different people who come and worship here on Sunday have a sense of belonging. It is a great joy that so many people come and worship here, but it is also a challenge. It can be quite hard for people to get to know each other, to build up friendships and to feel part of the church in such a crowd. Yet I am often told by new comers how friendly and happy the church is and how welcome they have been made to feel. This is an important act of generosity that needs to be recognised as such. It is always easier to talk to the people we know than to make the effort to make friends with strangers, but this is an effort that some of us have willingly made. Thank you.

The PCC have played an important part in this by thinking about how to help us to do this, how to set up the tea and coffee or do other things and this is something that they will continue to do.

Another sign of growth in faith in faith has been several members of the congregation beginning to explore vocation to public ministry in the church.

It has been encouraging to see our work with young people that so many different members of the congregation contribute to, beginning to bear fruit. Children are now telling their parents that they want to come to church, they are participating more in our worship and so growing in faith and love of God. We are extraordinarily fortunate to have so many children worshipping with us, wanting to be admitted to communion, and being baptised. There are many churches who would love to have the breadth of ages in Church on Sunday that we do. It is also important to recognise that one of the fruits of this work has been that our children are more engaged and less noisy during services. The one area of concern I have with our young people is the decline in the size of our 9-13's group. We need to think about how we can engage our older young people and continue to nurture their faith. Hopefully we are making progress in laying a foundation for a live of faith and love of God among our young people.

I was also very pleased at our last PCC meeting when I tentatively suggested that we become a fair-trade church that the whole PCC immediately agreed. We now need to think about how we put that resolve into practice.

This year has also seen significant progress in remedying some of the long standing issues with the fabric of the building. Our beautiful church is an enormous asset in our ministry and mission. It is a wonderful space for worship and it is a powerful testament to the enduring presence of the Church on the High Street. We need to maintain it so that it can continue to serve the mission of the Church. The roof is now in good order, the church yard has been less of a problem and the generous donation of a prickly hedge and fence by Veolia should help us be better neighbours to the residents of the glebe.

It has been disappointing that the costly work on the heating system over the summer resulted in the church often being inadequately heated during the coldest winter in twenty years. Thank you for your patience in bearing with this as your church wardens and I worked to resolve it. We are now hopeful that the remaining problems have been addressed, however we won't know for sure until next winter.

There is still a lot that needs to be done to the building and it is going to cost a lot of money. It has been extremely encouraging to see how quickly we raised the sums for the renewal of the tower and I am hopeful that the work on the ringing chamber will start in the middle of May. It demonstrated to me once again that if the project is right the money will come. The next thing for the PCC to decide will be what we should be doing next to the fabric, but this needs to grow out of identifying where God is calling and what the focus of our Mission should be.

The liturgical and cultural highlights of the past year have been our St Leonard's Day celebration and Bach's St John Passion on Good Friday. On both these occasions wonderful music gave depth and beauty to our worship. What was notable also was that these services both attracted significant numbers of people who were not regular members of the congregation from the local community.

One of the riches of Streatham is the wealth of talented artists of all disciplines there are living among us and it has given me a sense that perhaps the focus of our mission should be exploring Jesus statement of that he 'came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' through the arts. The year the focus of our work on the PCC and in the ministry team in the coming year is going to be exploring mission and what sort of mission God is calling us to here in Streatham.

The world around us is preoccupied with having, taking and getting. The purpose of life is often presented as being about getting stuff. The gospel in contrast tells us that we discover the riches of life through giving and sharing. Making something beautiful together whether it is in our worship or in performance is a power challenge to the forces that diminish our humanity and reduce us to consumers and commodities. The generosity that lies at the heart of creativity can help us share a glimpse of what Jesus was calling us to in the Kingdom of God.