

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We are at a really exciting time in the life of our church and in the life of the church year. Last Thursday we celebrated Ascension and entered the period we have now come to know as Thy Kingdom Come. Next Sunday is Pentecost when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and upon the followers of Jesus. It is the time of year when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit which fires us up, empowers us, nudges us, whispers and encourages us.

So it feels a wonderful time for us to be considering as a church **where** it is that we believe God to be calling us to be **both as individuals and as a church community**.

At our 10am service later on this morning we are going to be looking at what we believe to be our priorities for the next while. The job at 10am (wish me luck!) is to take the congregation on a whistlestop tour of where we have been (preparing for vacancy; our vacancy; where we have reached as a PCC; and finally where do we feel we are being called to be; where our priorities should lie and where it is that you feel called to join in.

A lot of this has been written about in Martin's letter in the June magazine and so I'm not going to delight you with the power-points and huge amounts of detail but it will be on the website later and Martin (who is enjoying a well-earned couple of days on the Isle of Man preaching and watching the TT races) will be more than happy to fill in any gaps.

We spent a day in November (with Bishop Helen Ann) and a morning last month at Marrick Priory.

Our main things were -

1. Where do we as a church need to be?
2. How would we get there?
3. The need for a vision and a strategy for growth
4. We also talked about our aims for 2019 and beyond.

We realised we needed to look at what our strengths and weaknesses because without them we wouldn't know what resources we would available to us.

We recognised ourselves to be often welcoming, imaginative with some services, proud of our music and bells, with good lay involvement and a mixing of community and civic society.

We also saw that we could do with thinking about how to develop our work with young families, increase links between our church and schools, develop our faith and spirituality and think about our building both with access, accommodation and layout.

We also saw that there was plenty of scope to think about the church being a supporter and leader of town initiatives, scope to support other churches as a resource and to re-establish CTIR.

There is the issue of finance which is always tricky, the aging congregation and there is always scope for the church to be seen more as the church of all and not just the congregation.

However, no strategy for growth and development whether spiritually or numerically can be achievable without the will of God and prayer.

A wise man said “Don’t build bigger than the prayer foundations”.

Having agreed at our away day a strategy for growth with the steer to be given by a Parish Development Group (made up of a few members of the PCC, ministry team and congregation) the PDG went away and came up with a message in our pocket which was agreed by the PCC and which we hope to underpin where it is we wish to be –

a people and a place where love works

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And so it is with this in mind we came up with some thoughts at our PCC away morning last month where we would like to focus -

Within **Our Purpose of a place of Worship and Prayer** we would like

- Review our service pattern and aim to have a better integration between our various congregations.

Looking at Outreach and Evangelism we could

- Use Holy Trinity more (for a range of services/events/activities)
- Reach out to young people, using a range of services
- Promote to the wider community the church as a meeting place

Looking at Outreach – Community service we could

- Use Holy Trinity for social welfare initiatives and investigate our use of the curtilage

- Build links with active local agencies
- Give St Mary's a presence at the Christmas Market
- Look at providing a Christmas Day dinner in town

Looking at Growth – Discipleship and Pastoral Care we could have

- More study groups (consider timings/group size/venue/topic)
- Prayer ministry
- Provision/support for young families
- Safeguarding
- Listening courses
- St Mary's presence in residential homes
- Welcome events for newcomer

And regards our Infrastructure – Finance, Fabric, Administration we would need to look at

- Structures/systems required
- Finance: stewardship/fund-raising/management are separate activities and each need resourcing
- Fabric: maintenance/fitness for purpose(eg re-ordering)
- Administration: review and resource the whole process

Our gospel reading today talks about making God's love known to others, just as Jesus made his love for God known to his disciples. We can talk about love and being a people and a place where love works, **or** we can **truly be** a people and a place where love works.

Our prayer as a PCC and ministry team is that we each feel inspired to spend some time this week prayerfully considering where it is that the Holy Spirit is leading us – where it is that you feel that we are being called to be –

What are we missing?

Where do you feel our priorities should lie?

And what can we do to play our part and join in this ongoing revolution of love in action?

Let's pray – Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire; strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love, and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen