February 2022 magazine letter

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ
As a church we are always looking at how we are doing with our mission. Our task as the gathered body of Christ is to make disciples, by bearing witness to Jesus Christ the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to glory of God the Father.

Mission needs to receive the firstfruits of the church’s attention—because it is at the heart of the gospel. It is, after all, part of Christ’s great commission to the church:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

If our church fails in this, no matter what other good things we do, we will have failed in the unique mandate that Christ has given us. It’s great to do other good things and engage in good works and social action. But it’s the stewardship of the gospel that remains utterly unique to the Christian church. That is the priority of Christian mission.

Our PCC have been looking at our mission priorities with Rev Neil Kelley from St Laurence’s Chorley. One of the things we considered was relationships and outward focus: People first of all belong (attend church), then believe (feel part of the church family), and finally become (discipled, serving God and giving sacrificially). We need to emerge from Covid with a fresh focus on building up the church again. As a result of this the PCC are looking at how we welcome people to our church through the Everybody Welcome course. I’s a course where everybody helps to grow their church.

The course looks at **Helping people discover the church’s existence and character.** People have to at least know about us, and may well need to know us in person, before thinking of becoming part of our group. How do we make contact with the local community and how can we become more visible in it?

**Giving people a good experience of the church premises**The church grounds and buildings can attract or deter people. How daunting is the physical business of entering our building for the first time? Can we develop our facilities to provide a positive and anxiety free experience?

**Giving people a good experience of the church people**A newcomer’s first experience of the church community usually determines whether they wish to join it. So how can our church offer a friendly, stress-free welcome to the local community? But people need to experience divine welcome as well as human. So how can we best give newcomers the chance to meet with God in our worship and other community events?

**Helping newcomers belong to the church community and start contributing to it**Church attendance should be a step along the way to Christian discipleship. Most people aspire to belong, not just attend. The main factor in deciding whether someone stays is whether they make friends quickly. So how can our church be motivated, trained and organised to offer attractive friendship and belonging to newcomers? How can newcomers turn into members who exercise their own Christian ministry through the church?

**Integrating newcomers through the work of the Welcome Team**Some newcomers will be well picked up by individual enterprise. But probably many will not. A church that is serious about welcome has to designate and train a team of Welcomers with a clear and specific ministry of ensuring that new people become integrated into the community. So how can we best select, train and deploy our team so that every newcomer is offered a good welcome?

Once we have done the course as a PCC Janet and I will be sharing what we’ve learned with the whole congregation so that we are working as one big team together on this. And if you feel that God is calling you to a specific ministry of welcome and befriending those who join us at St Leonard’s please do speak to me.

With my love and prayers

Tracy

