

Rector's Report 2009

The Rector's report is traditionally a chance to stop – look back and give thanks – and then look forward too. It is a chance to say thank you as well to lots of people. As ever, if I miss someone out, my apologies!

It has been, as ever, a remarkable year – our first full year back in this building. There have been teething difficulties – not least with the heating – and we continue to pursue the builders to complete all the snagging details. However, your continued response as a church has been remarkable. To sum up, you pledged £4.3 million and have given £6.1 million to Project 21 so far – an incredible figure!! If you add in the increase of 50% to our normal giving, and the fact that our biggest target for the Global Focus fund was met in the shortest time (two weeks), it has been a remarkable year financially, especially given the backdrop of the credit crunch and the wider economic scene in Edinburgh and the UK.

We have said goodbye to staff members – Duncan and Jane Maclaren, Kieren Barnes, Emma Buck, Trey Gilliam and Muriel Samson – and we look forward to welcoming John White as our new Youth Director in January, and to appointing a new Associate Rector soon as well! We have said goodbye temporarily to Jess as she has gone on maternity leave but have been able to welcome Ruth Milliken who has stepped in to the Operations Manager role. Jess, thank you for all you have done and we pray God's blessing on you, Byron and 'Kylie'.

Vestry wise – we have made a significant change in how we work as a Vestry – meeting for two months in Church Life and Resources groups and then in the third month as a whole Vestry. Having been dominated by Project 21 over many years, Vestry agendas are now returning to overseeing the life of the church and seeing how we can improve it. I would like to thank particularly the three Vestry members who are stepping down this year. All three have been on Vestry during Project 21 and have each contributed immensely during their time on Vestry. Joy has given much to the Staffing group and Sue has been a very efficient Secretary, while Duncan too has served as Chair of the Staffing group. I want to say thank you to each of them for their support, encouragement, service and commitment over several years. Their wisdom and prayers have been invaluable.

It is hard to sum up the past year – but let's quickly try. The new building has hosted events such as Alpha Scotland Day, a Mission Scotland conference, the Global Leadership Summit, an evening to celebrate the Bethany Care Shelter, a Burn's Night Ball for the YF and Cheryl's in Nairobi, a Ball for a Brazilian charity (New Destiny) in the summer and a day conference for churches across Scotland with a team from North Carolina. In addition we have been used by Macmillan Cancer Care, the Scottish Government and Edinburgh City Council

as well as other secular groups. We were delighted for our architects Lee Boyd when the new building was voted 'Building of the Year' by the Edinburgh Architectural Society. We have also been able to help at least 10 churches in different parts of the UK who are in the process of beginning building projects.

We have interviewed our local MP, had guest speakers such as Brian Maclaren, Nicky Lee, Steve Haas, Paul Weston, David Wilkinson and Graham Cray – as well as visitors from Kenya and Christians in Sport. We have had baptism and affirmation services – run Alpha, Marriage, Marriage Prep, Parenting and CAP Money courses, helped begin a pilot Street Pastors' scheme with seven other churches and seen our Parent and Toddler groups regularly attract 80 parents and 80 toddlers each Thursday morning to reduce the building to organised chaos.

Next year we will begin to host a bi-monthly youth event (Powerpoint) for young people across the city and see Alpha Scotland return in February, host a three day conference in September to celebrate 10 years of the 24/7 prayer movement across the world and see Worship Central hold an event later in 2010 where we hope to see the place filled to capacity with people worshipping God.

If you ask me for my highlight however, it would have to be the Week of Prayer in September. Prayer evenings each night, a Prayer breakfast and an evening to celebrate 90 volunteers who head up different ministry areas in the church's life was tremendously encouraging. Being prayed for each night was so affirming and helpful – and God spoke very clearly. Three things emerged.

Firstly, to see the church more as a family – and be more careful as to how we speak to, and about, each other. There was a sense of a line being drawn over past complaints and to be mindful that all we do in this place should glorify God.

Secondly, the challenge came to draw more people into this family – to echo the words of Psalm 68 v.6 which speaks of God placing the lonely or solitary in families. That might mean those who are married, single, old, young, or those who have no contact as yet with God. We continue to look for that need which no one else in the city is meeting and see what God might do with us.

The third thing was people feeling that they should pray for me – which was encouraging and humbling. Please do carry on!! The past year has not always been easy and I think it was only with hindsight that I realised over the summer how tired we were as a church due to Project 21, and how tired I was as well. During the summer however I sensed God saying we were on the edge of the edge of the next phase in the life of P's and G's. This autumn has seen a number of new initiatives begin, and numbers attending services have risen as well. The meals, before and after services, have increased our sense of togetherness as a church and more people have stepped forward to volunteer and serve in different areas of the church's life. The handbook produced in September shows the extent of the variety of our life together as a church.

So, a new building, a new sense of God working among us and a new sense of commitment to each other. God is in the business of constantly doing new things. We remain committed to our vision – to be a Christ-centred, biblical community, worshipping and serving from the centre of Edinburgh. We remain committed to our strategy – worshipping God, loving people and serving the world. But what does that mean?

Over the weekend Graham Cray laid out a biblical view of discipleship – what it means to follow Jesus. He helpfully reminded us of what it means to be a disciple – *‘it is about living the difference that Jesus makes in whatever context your daily life puts you in – in the words of Dallas Willard, it is believing that Jesus knows better than you do what is best for your life – it is about embodying Jesus within the local culture – it is about being a proactive community doing good in its society while subverting some of the society’s values – it is not about security or safety, comfort or convenience which are the four dominant values of middle class Britain – Christian community is not primarily about togethernesstogetherness happens but only as a by-product of the main project of trying to be faithful to Jesus.’*

It is both complex and simple – multi faceted and straightforward – God wants us to become more like Jesus and as we do so, to become more fully ourselves as we deny ourselves and effect change in the culture, society and individual lives all around us. It is, as Bishop Graham reminded us, to look at our world and see things that will not do – that will not do when Jesus returns and therefore, will not and should not do now. That might be in the area of the environment or poverty, it might be in the area of a relationship or lifestyle choice, it might be in how money is spent or not spent, Christmas is celebrated or not, an area of injustice or depravation. Jesus did not simply die to take us as individuals to heaven – important though that is. He died for the redemption of ‘all things’ – it does not mean that everyone therefore will be saved – but that we too should work for the redemption of all things – but it can only happen as we follow Jesus and as his character, power and values live in and through us – which takes us back to discipleship – us following where he leads and his character being formed more fully in us.

Could this be the new thing that we are on the edge of? To take whole life discipleship more seriously, in ourselves and in each other? To become individuals and a church where Jesus is seen more and more – in our services, our relationships, in our conversations and in our building. Now that is worth pursuing – and worth praying for. That we might ‘shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation’ (Philippians 2.15)