



*This Sunday we looked back in joy as we celebrated the huge number of people involved in all the activities that go on at St Paul's; and we also looked forward to our vision for the coming year. As last year, our enduring vision is to be a: **'Growing Community of Grace'** We were all given a summary on a post-card. However, just having a vision is not enough: vision without action is a dream and action without vision is a nightmare. Teams of people combining vision with action change the world. So we need to prioritise the actions that will turn our vision into reality.*

Read: Acts 2: 38 – 47.

Growing in Numbers and Core membership

- The early church grew in numbers exponentially once the Holy Spirit was released: **Acts 2: 38-41; 47.**
- Our church is growing in numbers: new services, increased attendance, Alpha courses and a new Youth Alpha starting, 68 new members and no shortage of visitors. However, too many people rest on the surface of our church and disappear without putting down roots into faith and friendship. We need to help people belong.
- Newcomers must be made to feel welcome, whatever the reason that brought them through our doors. It might be Christmas, or a baby baptism; the need for a school place, or because they have a believing spouse. We are honoured to have you here: we're all here because we need something: Jesus says, 'Come as you are.'
- Two signs of commitment:
 - a) Regular financial giving: experience the fun and the blessing that comes from being generous givers.
 - b) Serving: we need to encourage people to share their talents, especially if they are good with children!

Building our Community through stronger Small Groups. Acts 2: 42, 44, 45, 46, 47.

- But the growing must never be as a club, a clique or a religious 'in-group.' We want to grow as a community where you are known and valued for who you really are. Doing life with all sorts of people: loving each other.
- It's difficult to get to know people in a church of 500, so our vision is for stronger Small Groups, with a better structure and with leaders who are better resourced and supported: there will be new groups for new-comers and the current Alpha group is piloting a 'Cluster Model' this month which should resource leaders better and make it easier for new people to join us in following Jesus in the company of others.

Pressing deeper into the Transforming Gospel of GRACE. Acts 2: 38-39

- The promise of salvation through Jesus' self-sacrifice and of the gift of the Holy Spirit is made possible because of God's Amazing, undeserved Grace for everyone. whether they have been in church for 5mins or 50 years.
- And there is always more of God's grace on offer – to transform our characters, to increase our purity of living, to challenge the surrounding culture and to be the voice, hands and feet of Christ wherever he has placed us.
- Our vision is to press deeper into the adventure of discipleship, which doesn't happen by accident or in your sleep; it needs us to want it to happen. It would be wonderful if this time next year, we could all look back and say, 'Yes – this year I have grown to be a little more like Jesus – I have been transformed by the grace of God.'

'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.' Philippians 3 verse 12

Questions for discussion (You don't have to 'do' them all!)

1. Why are 'numbers' important when thinking about a church congregation?
2. Did we have an 'ideal size' for a church congregation in our heads when we have had to move home?
3. How can we get better at helping to integrate new people into the body of our church?
4. How do we help people to move in from the edges of the congregation towards becoming a core member?
5. In what way are small groups important for building a vibrant Christian church community?
6. Do we, as individual members of a small group, realise the potential impact we can have on the whole church?
7. How would our leaders like best to be resourced and encouraged?
8. How do we launch new small groups? Should we put (apparent) 'likes' together – or mix people up?
9. Have we ever thought of living 'intentionally' for Jesus? What difference would it make to the way we do things, think about things, make decisions, interact with people?
10. Can we encourage someone who we have seen growing in grace, either in our group or privately?