

St Paul's Dorking : Notes from Ruth's APCM and Sunday 30th April address

Where are we and Where are we going? A process of Listening and Discerning for small groups and other teams through May/June

Sunday's talk was both an introduction to a month of focus on prayer, and also an outline of the listening process for vision discernment that Ruth wants us to follow. There will be more opportunities later in the month to focus more closely on the prayer theme, and this week we would like to focus on listening for vision.

"Sovereign Lord, give us boldness and let us see wonderful deeds in your name".

Let's pray this prayer daily for a week, and see where it takes us! Read Acts 4 23-31 for our first sermon series example from Acts prayer in the early church. As we enter a month of prayer focus (see newsheet/website), let's ask God to reveal to us what He wants us to do, from the hundreds of possibilities we have available to us.

V 24: The prayer begins with a declaration of God's sovereignty, even in times of devastation and trauma. *Let's pray for a vision that reflects God's sovereignty!*

V29: A prayer for boldness. This isn't about becoming extrovert, it's about being able to testify simply and with confidence what God has done/is doing for us. *Let's pray for a bold vision!*

V30: Prayer for signs and wonders. God is at work; we see this in incredible things in Acts, but also in our own life at St Pauls. *Let's pray for a vision that builds upon and learns from the wonderful things God has been doing amongst us!*

WHERE ARE WE? (WHAT IS OUR CURRENT REALITY?)

At the APCM Ruth shared her joy at the 'wonder-ful' year it has been, as we have stood in awe of God, His grace and His work amongst us. She covered three ways to look at where we are:

1. Numerically. We have grown in numbers; for example, the unexpectedly large congregation at Easter, and we have seen growth in numbers being confirmed and baptised. There has also been growth in serving teams, CYM and in numbers giving financially.

2. Following our Mission Action Plan

(read the annual report for more information!).

Becoming **A growing Community of Grace**

Was our vision statement, with three key focus areas as outlined in the visual. Ruth gave some thoughts on these as follows:

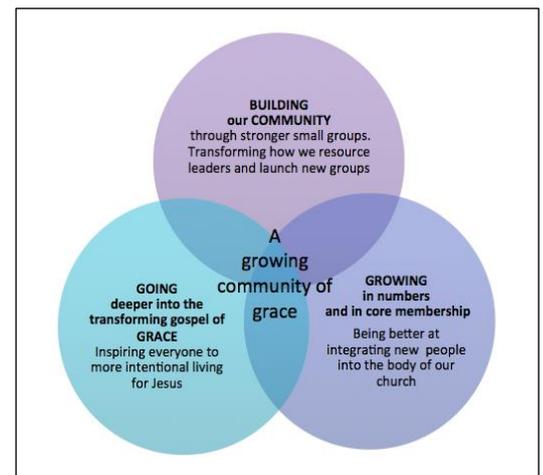
- **GROWING in core membership.** Some of the initiatives to integrate new people include the October 'serving teams marketplace', a new evening service on Sunday, more Welcome Lunches and Teas and a much greater focus on keeping track with how well new people were journeying into fellowship and faith

- **Building our COMMUNITY through stronger small groups** We appointed new pastors to support SG leaders, and a new cluster model for the Alpha groups, and took 16 leaders to the Willow Creek Leadership Summit.

- **Pressing deeper into the gospel of GRACE.** We ran several sermon series/small groups studies focussed on intentional discipleship, just tried Just Try (!), launched a new men's ministry Momentum, published two books of stories/testimonies, appointed a Head of Prayer and a Head of Social Justice Network, held a focussed week of prayer and ran a new Lent prayer in the home initiative and began the new HomeGrown focus for Childrens & Youth and their parents.

This was alongside the incredible day to day ministry and mission of everyone in our church which is extraordinary in its own right.

Q1. Taking each of the three areas, what you have seen in each of them? What has been particularly fruitful and where are the gaps?



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3. Looking at stories that sum up the year. In her talks Ruth gave her own favourites which include training Alpha leaders, the cross-church/town initiatives to help refugees, showing children in need the love of Christ, even if it's only for one week at Holiday Club (the yellow duck story), the celebration lunch for Pat Goode's retirement and both marrying and baptising her neighbour.

Q2. *What is your favourite story of last year and why?*

WHAT DO WE SEE? (WHAT IS OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE?)

Our task this term is to figure out what is the God-given **vision** for the health and growth of the church, and what is the plan of **action** that we are going to work on to see that vision realised. In this season (May/June) we have chosen to take time over this, to listen to God and to each other. We need to listen well, to see things how God sees them, and to have the courage to be bold, take risks, dig deep in what He asks of us.

Ruth shared some of her early thinking for us to consider alongside our own ideas and reflections in prayer. She pulled out three themes and asked us to consider questions within them:

1. **How do we make sure we grow in a way that benefits the Church as a whole, not just St Pauls?** We are a big church by CofE standards (the average is 30!). How can we make the most of our local school/church/business links to support the growth of faith in our town?
2. **Do discipleship needs differ across different stages of life and faith, and if so how do we make sure we support them all?** How can we better equip people as fruitful followers of Jesus at every stage of life? Here are three example groups Ruth called out
 - Parenting 11-18s in a world of change/social media influence; what can we do to support parents who are discipling their children?
 - The 50-60s cohort- what does a fresh adventure in faith look like, when life is placing many demands from children and parents, and you may have been a Christian for a long time?
 - The 20-somethings – how can we invest in this age group to make sure they are radically fruitful followers of God wherever he calls them?

Q3. *Do you think these groups need some specific support and if so what type? Are there other groups do you think we should be considering and why?*

3. **Do we need to redefine how we do evangelism? What does fruitful Mission look like?**
 - Why do we not see people coming to Christ more often? What are the barriers to thousands of Dorking people becoming Christians and how can we overcome them? What fresh expressions of church can we risk, to see whether we can reach more people with the Gospel? How do we evangelise in today's culture – what about those who will never come to Alpha?
We have 800 children living in our parish alone, and half their parents call themselves Christian. What would it take if our vision was for even half of those children to become followers of Jesus?

These are some of the questions that keep Ruth awake at night, and which deepen her commitment to listen to what God is saying for us in this season.

Q4. *What is your response to these questions; do they resonate? What are your questions, and what might God's answers be?*

Q5. *What is your vision for St Pauls? Where do you think God is leading us over the next 2 years?*

Q6. *What are the green shoots of new life/ideas you want to nurture? What should we stop doing in order to get there?*

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There are a number of questions interwoven into the summary above. Please do consider them as you go, and then consider:

Q7. How do we get there, and what will be your/your group role? We will not be putting an action plan together until after the listening process, but for now please consider these questions: What are your thoughts on practical steps we can take to fulfil the vision you find you are exploring as you listen to Ruth and talk to each other? What is your own role? How does it affect your own ministry/that of your group?

And finally, pray! Please use the prayer Ruth compiled from her sermon; are our thoughts reflecting God's sovereignty, are we being bold, and are we seeing/looking for and believing in the miraculous potential around us? ***"Sovereign Lord, give us boldness and let us see wonderful deeds in your name"***.

You might want to reflect on these questions- particularly number 7- over a number of weeks through May and June, and be praying into it. Please do consult anyone in leadership if you want to talk more! However, it will be most useful to get your feedback by **Sunday May 14th**, so that we can collate it/digest it, and feed it into the Leadership Awayday on the 20th May. Please send your collective or individual feedback to laurac.parker@btinternet.com (note the 'c'©)