

ST JAMES NEW BRADWELL: AN OPEN, GROWING PRESENCE FOR CHRIST

Introduction:

Late last year group of St James members attended the Partnership's vision building day. Each congregation invited to reflect on their own church under four headings: celebrate, pray, dream, change. We put things on post-it notes and then added our support for some of those things with sticking brightly coloured dots on them. Reflecting back to us, John Robertson, the director of mission highlighted a few key points. First, there is a dedicated core who are committed to running the church. Secondly, there is a strong sense of openness and welcome which shows itself in different ways. Thirdly, there is a desire for real growth. Fourthly, we can be pre-occupied with the building. Since then there are two things that have happened to help us build on the vision building exercise and come to the point where we can express that vision in a short sentence. That sentence is: "St James, New Bradwell: an open, growing presence for Christ." The two things that helped us come to that vision statement were ongoing discussions in the church council and the scribble sheets which I left during my three-month study leave after Easter. Nicola preached about the vision building process at the end of October. Today I want to unpack the three words that make up the heart of our vision.

As Advent is a time of preparation, looking forward to the coming of Christ. Isaiah and John the Baptist whose words we have heard again this morning, were prophets who had a vision for the future. They spoke to encourage God's people to hope and follow, as it were, the dreams that God placed in their hearts. So what do we hold as our vision for St James? What do we think God might be calling us to focus on as the values which shape our life as a congregation? What is packed into: "St James, New Bradwell: an open, growing presence for Christ."?

OPEN

Out of three possible images that I suggested we asked you to scribble about, the one that attracted most comments was that of the open door. (the others were pilgrim and tree.) Strong sense of openness and wanting to be an open church. A dedicated core work to ensure we stay open.

Who are we open for and how?

To God – weekly gathering for worship, prayer, and proclaiming the Gospel is so much part of our spiritual "DNA" that we sometimes fail to see its significance. First priority is that we remain

a place and a group of people who are open to God. We have made room to help others enjoy this openness especially in being welcoming to children and the occasional “outsider”. We also hold different kinds of spiritual events like Open Door, Good Friday and Glow in the Dark.

To each other - a number of comments on post-it notes show that we affirm the ways in which we can be open to each other. There are two I’d like to highlight. We are open to each other’s different Christian traditions and enjoy a variety of approaches to worship and prayer; the joining of the Methodist congregation with those at St James is significant; our Sharing Agreement makes our openness legal and lasting. We are also open to younger families and their children. The play area helps children feel at home; agreeing to admit baptised children to communion is another aspect of our openness to each other. This leads on to and is part of our openness.....

To others – we’re not just open for worship. We are open to others. People find here a place where personal encounters happen; people make friends; there are social events like concerts, Christmas Tree Festival, Lent lunches, coffee mornings and celebrations. The development project is a key to this: with toilets and improved facilities like a new kitchen, we can make an even more welcoming environment for visitors who might become regulars. We are beginning to think about a more open and versatile space by removing the pews and having seating which can be arranged in different ways for different occasion. We are also open for others to hold occasional events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals when most of the people here are visitors. The Tree based mission statement emphasises we are here for EVERYONE.

“Porous” was Nicola’s comment about the feel of St James. What she meant was the people can enter and leave easily – it is a place that many in the community feel is theirs and it is not too intimidating to step inside and feel at home quickly.

Being open is something we believe in wholeheartedly and we imagine we would always want to be like that. Our history is also one of being open to God, each other and others beyond, although the future of being open will change and we want to embrace that in faith.

GROWING

Openness in these ways provides fertile soil for growth. Our renewed vision has grown out of the mission statement captured in the image of a tree. Growth is very much desired in different ways which is good. In fact, if any organisation, including a church, is not growing, then it is stagnating and will eventually die. You can't stand still when it comes to life!

John Robertson's reflections: *Why* do we want to grow? For its own sake? In order to keep the show afloat? In order that more people may come to faith in Christ? For service of the needy?

What growth is envisaged?

3 dimensional growth:

In depth- spirituality, discipleship, commitment including leadership

In breadth – diversity, engaging with community, for everyone including children

In numbers – higher numbers, more members, attracting more people to join us

Need to grow leaders to enable this to happen.

PRESENT

In order to be open and to grow we have to be in a place where all of this can take place! St James well embedded in its local community. Members are drawn from wider area than New Bradwell. That's why we haven't said we're only present for Christ in New Bradwell! The physical and personal presence we have is vital. Caring for our physical presence as a building helps us stay open and provides a home where this particular church family can thrive.

Anglican mission is about being local (A parish for every part of the land); but we're also a "gathered" church in that individuals join us from other places and traditions;

Number of links with community organisations: school; Band; community centre; possible because local people identify with St James and feel it is *their* church;

A focus: members not just from New Bradwell; church not just for NB people

Not the only Christian (or religious) presence in NB. "*An open, growing presence..*"

Presence for **Christ**: we are clear that we are followers of Jesus Christ and make no apologies!

CONCLUSION

Vision statements just a fad? We talked ourselves out of it and back in again at a recent council meeting!

Grown out of what many of us feel and think about our church – spirit speaking in our experience.

Focus – helps us be clear about why we are here and what we are about; signals to others that we have a clear sense of purpose and might attract them to a worthwhile cause.

A compass to take our bearings when it comes to important decisions: does, whatever might be proposed, help us to be open, growing and present as Christians in this place?