

## The Vicar's Report

At my first PCC I asked for six months of 'listening time' before major things were undertaken. I am very aware that those six months have past, and you may well be expecting a lead as to the way forward.

At this point, one general thought is in my mind, which might apply to almost any Anglican parish which is not of distinctively 'Evangelical' churchmanship. We need, somehow, to find ways of reaching out, not only in friendship and service to those around us (which I think many church members and endeavours here do excellently well) but also in ways which actively lead people to faith - with integrity and without the 'cringe factor'. Somehow, we need to find more opportunities and strategies, outside the church as well as within it, to speak out what we believe and why we believe it. And we need to explore the reasons as to why we might want to do that. Our culture tells us that faith is a private thing, and only causes trouble when it comes out in the public sphere. Our media tell us, implicitly, that no one can really take Christianity seriously these days. But our hearts and our Gospel tell us something different - 'Go and make disciples of all nations...I have other sheep, which are not yet of this fold...Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into the harvest'. And this is difficult. We would often much rather leave that part of Christian life to the 'experts' - have other people be the harvesters. *I* find it difficult to bear witness to my faith. It is only the fact of wearing a collar, and having a role which officially involves speaking about God, which sometimes spurs me to do it. In social settings, like many of you probably, I would often much rather change the subject than be too embarrassingly 'religious'.

And yet, we value our faith. God means so much to us in our lives. We are glad to belong to the church. Perhaps we'd find it hard to imagine life without it. Sometimes we are sad for other people that they don't share these things. Or we look at society, and wish that it could rediscover a Christian compass to direct it. But such a compass can only be discovered by individuals finding, and being found of Christ. How best can we serve that purpose as individuals, and as a church?

This, I think, is the general direction which perhaps we should be taking as we assess all ideas and projects for the future. I suggest that we should undertake some kind of 'mission audit', looking at what we have, who we are, what our setting is, what we do, and what we *might* do, fairly rigorously in this light. Care, compassion and service will be important parts of the picture, of course. Worship will be central and undergirding to any thoughts about mission. Our spirituality would have to be renewed, to give us the deep foundations we need. But beyond all these things, we mustn't duck the issue of publicly 'naming the name' and inviting others to discipleship, as central to our Christian mission. We cannot be complacent as a church, simply because the mobile nature of the parish's population continually brings us visiting Christians from elsewhere to join us. Nor can we cop-out by saying of our neighbours that many of them go to church elsewhere in the city. Yes, some do. But Christians are still significantly a minority here, perhaps particularly among the young.

To do a thorough 'mission audit', which involved everybody in re-thinking the church, is something which would perforce take a lot of energy. It might start with members of the Ministry Forum brainstorming about what published materials might be helpful; it might go on to members of the PCC being asked to read something, and then spend time away together asking sharp questions. It might include particular issues for each of our groups and committees to work on. It might result in a certain amount of reassessment of priorities. Given this description of what could be involved, I hope you think we could share in making it the overarching enterprise for the coming year.

Out of such an audit, other things may come. I know that before I came there was enthusiasm and planning for doing things to our buildings. That may very well be the right thing to do. But I

know how easy it is to think that one is doing something important, because there will be a tangible legacy left behind. At the moment, our buildings are doing a grand job – the Community Centre is well used and much valued in the neighbourhood. It raises a significant amount of money for the church. I would want arguments for putting energy into major fund-raising, and suspending operations for the duration of alterations, to be very well made within the context of the mission audit. And any changes within the church building would need to be thought through in the same context.

Meanwhile, some other things are cropping up which perhaps need to be dealt with sooner rather than later. For instance, as I wrote in *Seek* in April, the question as to whether the ‘All-age’ worship once a month is serving its purposes as a true experience of worship, an instance of real inclusion - and, finally, as a form of mission.

There are also other ideas being circulated - which originated in our new Ministry Forum, a sort of cross-disciplinary ‘think-tank’ made up of the various recognised ministers of our church, which include that of making St Mark’s a venue for films and their discussion, a form of pre-evangelism which would sit well with our history as a theatrical church. And then there is also, of course, the possibility of doing another play in the nearer future. I would welcome that, but we would have to think carefully about how to give energy to that as well as to the process of reassessing the church’s life in the light of mission. Nevertheless, I am well aware that drama has been one of St Mark’s most effective forms of mission in recent years, and is likely to remain so, as long as we have the active enthusiasts we do.

Another idea, so far just in my head, is that we might want to follow the General Synod’s recent lead, and assess our church for its environmental awareness and impact, and see if we can improve in our stewardship of God’s creation. There are various schemes available to help and challenge churches in this area, and I would be very glad if there were people in the congregation who would like to pick up this ball and run with it.

This is not so much a report on the last six months as a look forward. May I finish by taking a glance backwards, to thank you all, once again - and particularly the churchwardens, past and just retiring - for introducing me to a church in such good heart, a thriving community, which my family and I have been very happy to join?

**Maggie Guite**