

Burford Vicar's Report 2016

given at the APCM on Monday 24th April 2017 at the Warwick Hall

2016 has been a momentous year in the life of the Burford Benefice. The most significant achievement has been the completion of the construction of the Warwick Hall and opening the new building in September. The Warwick Hall Redevelopment has taken up a considerable amount of our time, energy, finances and prayer over the last seven years and I am so grateful to God for everyone who has contributed in whatever way to the project. However, our vision was never just to build a new church and community centre but to create a facility which would be, 'the heart of our church's ministry and the heart of our community's life.' Wonderfully, this vision is beginning to be fulfilled. Our childrens and youth work has now settled into its new home, Friday Focus is flourishing, Rock-a-Tots fills the Hall on a Tuesday morning and 'Uncover' evangelistic groups are meeting there as well. Discipleship groups, prayer meetings and Bible studies have met in the Hall regularly. We have hosted the first Cotswold Men's Convention and other churches are using the Hall for days away. The Café is becoming increasingly popular amongst local people and visitors and the church staff are now working from the Tremaine Room. It is very encouraging to see a good number of local societies and clubs using the Hall and an increasing number of commercial lets as well. All this is a remarkable achievement considering that we have only been open for business since September.

Along with the redevelopment of the Warwick Hall there have been some significant areas of growth and development in the church's life. The new weekly 9.15 service in Burford has been launched and is holding its own and the 11am service has continued to grow in numbers. We have seen a number of people attend our evangelistic courses, Uncover, Life Explored and Christianity Explored. Our women's ministry continues to grow and we have launched a new men's ministry. Our biggest challenges are that our 11am service is full and we have no space for growth in our home groups or women's groups. These are the two most significant factors that are hindering further growth and that we will have to address urgently.

Because there are now so many people involved in so many areas of ministry it is quite impossible for me to thank everyone personally but I do want to thank all of you for all that you have done for the Lord and his church.

Along with great achievements have come some challenges as well. The completion of the Warwick Hall and its opening stretched our already struggling administrative resources to their limit and, along with other pressures, led to some staff illness and unhappiness amongst some of our church family. Most members of the church have probably been unaware of these problems which is a testament to the loyalty and discretion of the church family. The churchwardens and I thought that the issues were serious enough to commission a report on the church's staffing and structures. This was carried out by Howard Dodd, Ruth McCalman and Susanna Naylor over the summer and I am very grateful to them for their work. The report made a number of recommendations which I, the churchwardens and PCC have accepted and have begun to act upon. I would like to summarise the findings of the report to you.

Positively.....

- Burford Church is a successful church which has blessed the Benefice and more widely
- Aspects of the church are truly excellent and extraordinary
- Opening of the Warwick Hall demonstrates its ability to achieve amazing things
- Desire of the church family to pursue God's will obediently and creatively
- Team members' dedication to Burford Church, loyalty to Richard, hard work and desire to contribute at a higher level

Negatively....

- Treatment of individuals sometimes less than one would aspire to
- Poor technical skills to manage a team. Ignorance of good practice
- No-one with malign intent but overall not a loving, united, mutually-supportive team
- A high focus on task completion but little on care and development of the team
- Needs a revitalised vision that is fully enacted throughout the whole church family

Actions....

- Richard has met with staff and church members who have been hurt. Reconciliation, forgiveness and healing
- Renewed and Refreshed Church/Benefice Vision
- Rebuilding a United Church Team with a new Structure
- Richard being set free to lead and has a mentor
- Appointed an HR Advisor. Revised Staff Management and Recruitment Processes
- Leadership Team meeting more often and are on a 2 year Church Leadership Training Programme

A Renewed Vision for the Burford Benefice

As I said, one of the conclusions of the report is that the Benefice needs a refreshed and renewed vision. I am not yet in a position to present a fully worked out new vision for the Benefice with clear objectives. But I do want to present a new purpose statement and a set of values to guide us as we work out how as a Benefice we are going to serve our communities.

As I was thinking and praying with the church staff and PCC about our new vision, I was convinced that it had to focus around our relationship with God and our relationship with each other but I was struggling to put it into words. Then, towards the end of January, we were preaching on the parable of the prodigal son. And I was reminded of this picture, painted by the Christian artist Charlie Mackesy, which is a lovely depiction of the prodigal son in the embrace of his father. As I thought about this picture and the parable it illustrates, I began to feel very clearly that this is what I want our church to stand for. I want us to be a church which is so convinced of God's love for us that we relate to him like the prodigal son coming home to his father and we long that others should come home to him like this as well.

This is a picture that all of us should be able to relate to because we are all like the prodigal son who need to be constantly coming back to the loving embrace of our Father. But I am sure you know, there is another character in the story who is just as important as the prodigal son and that is the older brother who is furious when his younger brother comes home and refuses to join the party. Just as the father went out to greet his younger son he also goes out to his older son and pleads with him to come and join the party because 'this brother of yours was dead and is alive

again, he was lost and is found.' And that's where the story ends. We never discover if the older brother came to the party or not.

The point of the parable is that the older brother is just as lost as his prodigal brother. The prodigal son is lost in debauchery and wild living and rejection of his father. The older son is lost in duty, legalism, religion, hard work and censoriousness. In many ways he is more lost than his brother because he doesn't begin to understand the father's heart of love towards him or his brother. The message of the parable is that the Father longs for everyone to come home to him whether we are lost in license or legalism. As I said back in January, the message of the parable is, 'Wherever you are, whatever you have done, come home.' That is the message that I want us and all the churches of our Benefice to proclaim.

It has become clear to me, thanks to the report, that we've become far too taken up with all that we've been doing for the Father. We've been rather like the older son, very busy and dutiful but in danger of losing touch with the Father's heart of love for us and for people who are lost and for his desperately needy world. So I want to recast our purpose as a Benefice as a statement of why we exist rather than what we do. *'This church exists to delight in God's love and to share it with others.'* That has an inward focus, *'to delight in God's love'* and an outward focus, *'to share it with others'*. I'm not going to give a whole lot of ideas of how we are going to do that. Our task in the coming year is to work that out together. I hope that we will have some clear objectives by the Autumn.

Four Values

But I do want to give us four values to help us to evaluate what we are doing and decide what God might be wanting us to do in the future.

Bible – teaches us of God's love in Jesus

The Bible is the story of how people have become lost like the prodigal son. Like Adam and Eve, we have rejected our father and wandered away from him. The Old Testament and the New Testament are the story of how the Father has come looking for us, has welcomed us home and drawn us into his family for this life and for eternity. It's why we have such an emphasis on teaching the Bible in every part of church life. Not so we can become more knowledgeable but so we know God's love for us more and more deeply.

Prayer and Worship – how we respond to God's love in Jesus

When the prodigal son comes home, the first thing the father does is to hold a party and invite everyone to come and celebrate, including his grumpy older son. This is what God is constantly calling us to do – to celebrate his love for us as we praise and pray together. It is much easier to respond to God's love in Jesus when we are together, it's much harder, indeed impossible to do that on our own. God calls all of us to a celebration of his love in this life and for eternity.

Mission – how we share God's love in Jesus

When we have been welcomed home and we have experienced the love of the Father we will want to share that love with others who haven't come home yet. That's why we engage in Mission. It's not so much our mission but God's, we are joining him in his great task of seeking and saving lost people and drawing them back to the Father's arms of love. Evangelism shouldn't be something that we do but rather an overflow of God's love for us in Jesus to others around us.

Community – how we experience God’s love in Jesus

This value is quite similar to prayer and worship but the stress here is on our life together as the family who have come back to the love of the Father. The early Christians were distinctive in the way that they loved each other. I see this love in our church family the whole time, loving each other because we have been loved so unconditionally by the Father. As I said at Easter, we come to the cross alone but we leave with a family to love us and for us to love.

Another way of putting this is what would I love our church family to be known for in five years’ time? Or what would I want other people to say about Burford Church? “They are a church that really loves Jesus.” “They delight in the Bible because it helps them to love God”, “They respond to God’s love in deep prayer and heartfelt worship”, “They share God’s love with their friends and community in all sorts of creative and risky ways and they are a real family of believers who love each other in actions not just words”.

If these values are embedded into the life of our church and benefice it will also help us to decide what we ought to be doing and whether we ought to be doing things differently. For instance:

We might need to rethink what we do in our services and our pattern of services

We might want to work more closely with other churches in the Benefice

We might need to rethink our small groups

We might need to be more sacrificial than we are at the moment

These values are already changing how the leadership team operates. How might they affect the teams that you are part of?

A great advantage of being clear about what our values are is that we can evaluate everything we are doing by using them. e.g. your small group, the youth work, your Sunday congregation, your family. Break into 2s or 3s and think about the Purpose of our Benefice and the Four Values. Think about yourself or your family, your small group, the congregation you are part of. How do you and the groups you are in measure up against the four values? We will be preaching about these four values during the four Sundays of May.

A New Church Structure

One of the recommendations of the report was that we should have a new structure to set everyone free to exercise the ministries that God has called them to. This is where we have got to so far.

Governance

PCCs and Church Wardens. Not the operations team but the elected members of the church who have responsibility for oversight of all that we do. Ministry team will be reporting to the PCC and Wardens.

Ministry Team

Will eventually include everything we do. This is a start. Each of the orange boxes represents a member of the Leadership Team.

Operations Team

Will support everything that we do through the church office and the buildings

The clergy and wardens will form a separate team that meets with the leadership team regularly and has particular responsibility for leading services and teaching.

I would like to conclude with a verse that I was reading earlier this week, 1 Chronicles 22:19

Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the Lord God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the Lord.

David has made thorough and generous preparations for the building of the temple which his son, Solomon is to build. But before Solomon begins the work, he must do something even more important, he must devote his heart and soul to seeking the Lord and only then begin to build the sanctuary. We aren't building a temple even though we have built a beautiful Warwick Hall, but we are building a church of people. We, like Solomon, must remember the order: "Devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord" – "Delight in God's love" and then, and only then, "Begin to build the sanctuary" – "Share it with others".

"This Church exists to delight in God's love and share it with others"

Richard Coombs
24th April 2017