

CCH Inaugural Annual Church Meeting Pastor's Report- Sunday 17th March 2019

"Thus far the Lord has helped us"- 1 Samuel 7:12

It's been a real joy to prepare for this ACM, and I hope to share with you for a few minutes, some thoughts by way of reflection on where the Lord has brought us in the first 6 months, and where I believe he is leading us.

First of all, a reminder of that verse which we looked at in our All Age service today. 1 Samuel 7:1 – *"Thus far the Lord has helped us"*. The last 6 months and the years of preparation have been so encouraging, with such a sense of God going before us, and there is so much to thank God for. This verse is a good reminder of God our Helper who has been with us preparing the way, and who we can trust for the future whatever it might bring, in the church or in our lives.

Let's start by looking back. In many ways, the slideshow in the service sums up in pictures some of the highlights of the last 6 months. But here are 7 things which I'm particularly thankful to God for.

1) The preparation.

It was about two and half years before it actually happened that the Bishop of Ely encouraged us to plant a church in Huntingdon. Conversations started much before that and one time we came here on our day off, and I met a little old lady in a charity shop. When I asked her what Huntingdon is like, she wasn't very positive, but strangely Emma and I said to one another, "I wonder if the Lord is calling us to Huntingdon?!". The last few years have involved lots of prayer, lots of planning, and lots of sacrifice, and many of you have been on the journey all the way, and others have joined us more recently, but we are so grateful to God our Helper for each of you who has joined us.

2) The vision

The vision of our church is *"to see the wonderful good news of Jesus' rescue, which transforms, unites and equips a community, prayerfully shared with all in the Huntingdon area"*. It is summed up in our name. This will be revision for many of you (and it's all on our welcome video on our website), but it's helpful to return to again and again to recalibrate our sights. CHRIST CHURCH HUNTINGDON.

- **CHRIST** (loving Jesus) – We want to be a Church with Jesus Christ at the centre of all we do. That means that we have two key commitments to the *Bible*, and to *prayer*. We believe God speaks to us in his Word the Bible, and we speak to him in prayer (and we've been learning more about our dependence on God in prayer in recent sermon series on 1 Sam).
- **CHURCH** (loving One another) – We want to be a church that is deeply committed to Christian brotherly, sisterly love- bearing one another's burdens, praying for one another. Therefore we are committed to *truth* and *love* and our 5 new small groups (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday mornings) are a great place for this to happen, as well as informal chats and fun.
- **HUNTINGDON**- (loving Huntingdon) – Along with the other churches in Huntingdon we want to be a blessing to our neighbours. We are here for others. We are here to help the 98% of Huntingdon who don't know Jesus understand who he is- God's promised KING as we've been seeing in Mark's gospel- the one who loves us and has died to forgive us. So we have a commitment to our neighbours in word and deed. More on that shortly.

3) The move

It's a big thing to move church and all of you have done one of that, and it's perhaps an even bigger thing to move house for that church, and at least 9 households have made that sacrifice. I don't want to underestimate what a big thing it is to step out in faith to join a potentially fragile church plant under a very fallible leader. Some of you have moved from churches that you were in for up to 20 years. Churches where you came to faith, churches where you have invested in relationships. It's an incredible sacrifice. The Bishop said to me that whenever he hears criticism of CCH he points to the fact that so many were willing to move (sometimes to slightly tougher neighbourhoods) and that soon quietens any complaints!

4) The launch

After some wonderful Sundays meeting in people's homes, which gave us a chance to get to know one another better, to pray for the area, and to visit local churches, we came together in St Peters in September for a couple of trial runs, and then the launch with Bishop Stephen plus around 50 supporters on September 16th (6 months ago yesterday). It was great to have the support of so many Christians locally. The building has worked so well for us, and the services have run so smoothly, and that's a testimony to the amazing team of people using their gifts for setup, coffee, music, leading, kids work (which itself is a particular challenge) and so many other areas of ministry. It normally takes about 20 people for each Sunday service to happen. So we praise God for each one of you, and how, as we learned from Ephesians 4 as we use our gifts to serve Christ, "from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work". Thank you for the very considerable hard work that each of you have put in, much of it unseen and unsung by me. (Though not unseen by the Lord!)

5) The discussion

I'm referring here to what could have been quite a divisive discussion back in January this year: the role of men and women in leadership in the church, and whether going forward we would have male only bishops and advertise for a male pastor. We come from quite a wide range of views on this subject, with different brothers and sisters understanding different things from what Jesus teaches us for example through Paul in 1 Tim 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man". If you missed that discussion, I have the handout and the recording. My primary aim on that evening was that we would remain united, even if we didn't agree with one another. And thank the Lord, our Helper, that he answered that prayer. While I'm very positive about what I understand from the Bible on men and women having equal but different roles, and our council passed a resolution asking for the oversight of Bishop Rod Thomas (who will join us for our first birthday on 15th September), can I reiterate that all are welcome and respected in our church whatever their view on women bishops and pastors, and we will seek to relate well with local bishops male or female, and we pray for the appointment of the Bishop of Huntingdon in a couple of weeks.

6) The building

Another key discussion for the church council a couple of weeks ago was whether or not to start entering into planning negotiations with a Christian charitable trust about the purchase of a building as a midweek base for Christ Church Huntingdon. While we haven't taken off the table the possibility of needing a building longer term, we unanimously agreed not to take things forward with this particular building. This was partly because of location, financial risk, and also because of the provision of the use of St Barnabas which we use at least once a month, and to whom we are very grateful.

7) The people

We hope to be a church where believers, atheists, agnostics, or anything else is welcome, and for those who like stats, we have averaged 68 people on a Sunday since we started, made up roughly of 42 regular adults, 18 children, and normally about 8 visitors (often family friends and local supporters). Not everyone comes every week, but among up to 50 or so adults who come regularly on a Sunday (and these are rough & ready figures) you might be interested to know that...

- 20 are long termers from St Andrew the Great, 1 from another church in Cambridge.
- 9 from local churches here that have since closed meeting on Sundays
- 10 from local churches (all of which have sent you with their pastors blessing)
- And around 10 from other churches as far away as from Australia, Scotland and the US.

We continue to pray that those who have joined from outside Huntingdon would soon be outnumbered by those who have come to faith locally, as God builds his people "brick after brick" as one of our songs today puts it.

Thus far the Lord has helped us! And it's right to look back. But the "stone of help" enables us also look forward, and here's where I'd like to share my dream for the next year or so.

Looking forward. Let's look at each of the three parts of our name and vision.

CHRIST- we have been thinking about returning to the Lord in our sermons in 1 Samuel 1-8, and we will achieve nothing unless we are dependent on Jesus' Christ's *Scriptures* to lead and guide us, his *sacrifice* to cleanse and motivate us, his *Spirit* to energise and sustain us. Can I encourage each of us to continue to seek first Jesus' Kingdom and his righteousness? Can I say it again, because it's so foundational... As individuals and as a church we will achieve nothing of any eternal value unless we are dependent on Jesus- so do please pray for our church (and can I ask for me) to stay close to Him.

CHURCH- God has been shaping us together as a body who have come from around 15 different churches. It's bound to take little bit of time to feel like a new family. But we don't want CCH to feel like 15 churches put in a melting pot, or going forward simply "StAG in Huntingdon" (though many of us did come from StAG), but a new church with a new identity where each member is valued. One of the reasons we have asked for people to sign these yellow commitment forms is to ask people to say, "I'm going to commit to CCH as my home church". It's also why we've asked 3 people to join our church council who weren't originally from St Andrew the Great, so that we are more representative of the new body that we have become. And it's also why I'm asking anyone who isn't currently in a small group to consider joining one, so that if they currently feel a bit on the edge of things, they will feel right at the heart of things. Even if you can't get there every week, join a life group- we want to pray for you, support you and encourage you!

HUNTINGDON- As we have moved through these 6 months, God has been kind in helping us grow in our relationship with Him (loving Jesus) our relationships internally (loving one another), and building on our school of ROC (school of evangelism), it's time to have a new season of outreach. I'm keen that as we look to *Christ* and to *one another*, we look *outwards*, and that's why I'd like to launch what I'm going to call a year of "**united gospel entrepreneurship**". **That's the phrase for the next 12 months.**

What I mean by that is that we need to discern as a church where the Lord is leading us to put our next evangelistic focus. As we discussed at the school of ROC (school of evangelism), God has given each of us particular individuals at home and at work who we want to share the good news with. But who is he leading us to as a church? **TEAM- Together Each Achieves More!**

So I'd like to launch a year of "united gospel entrepreneurship". How can we be creative in reaching out with the good news to Huntingdon?

This will take

- 1) *prayer*
- 2) *planning*- as we all (especially the new council) figure out what to focus on
- 3) *pounds*- we have several thousand pounds committed to our budget for outreach
- 4) *projects*- Some of you have already mentioned to me ideas for getting people together- let me mention one initiative from Jamie- "Men behaving honestly" (a gathering of guys- Christian and not to come together, be honest about life, and build the bridge of friendship across which the gospel can travel). It's a great idea, and you will be able to think of others.

We won't be able to do everything, we are a small church, but we can do a few things well. Can I encourage a spirit of entrepreneurship? More on this as the year goes on.

1 Samuel 7:12 Ebenezer- thus far the Lord has helped us. Let's pray that he will be our helper into the next 12 months and beyond. As we pray in our prayer meeting every month, "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*".

Charlie Newcombe March 2019.