

Vicar's Report – Cogges '08

2008 has been a challenging year for many reasons – call it the 7 year itch or what you ever you like but it has been a year were one has observed significant numerical growth. The electoral roll in 2007 contained 156 names. We now have over 200, which in church growth terms moves us from the realm of a small church to a medium church. Not only are we at a numerical transition but we also find ourselves at a place where we must cultivate a new environment that releases the missional imagination of the people of God. The work of any leader is to assist people in discerning what God is up to amongst them.

More of that in a minute.

What are the challenges that come with numerical growth?

The first one is obvious and I've heard it again and again in the past year when you mention someone's name in the congregation: "I haven't met them yet", or "what do they look like?"

Is it realistic to expect 200 hundred people to know one another? I think not. In a small church, the primary circle of belonging is the church as a whole, but in medium size church the primary circle of belonging is usually a specific affinity group or program.

That's why men's and women's ministries become vital and a healthy fellowship/home group structure must operate effectively outside corporate worship activities.

Invariably leadership functions differently in the medium size church. Since this size of church has far more complexity the leader must represent the different constituencies in the church. There is simply too much work to be handled by a small core of committed people(Cogges has functioned like this for years). Because of these factors, leaders need to be chosen less on the basis of length of tenure and strength of personality and more on the basis of skills and giftedness. In the medium size church, laity with the necessary gifts must rise to the surface and do more of the ministry alongside the staff team.

It also means that as leaders lead they too ought to be released into their areas of giftedness – why ought the congregation be the only ones liberated to follow their passions and fulfill their giftedness in ministry!!

It also fair to say that in medium size churches change happens through key groupings, teams AND those with prophetic ministries.

The real key to growth in medium size churches is developing the effectiveness and quality of the ministries that meet real needs and that are aligned to what the church has discerned is the will of God. The values that create the church's new identity will eventually enable the church to clarify what key ministries must take priority.

Needless to say significant administrative skills are required when a church transitions from one size category to another.

The second point concerns how a leader helps the church imagine its new future.

Nancy Beech,

'Our churches will die if we refuse to navigate the white waters of chaos always associated with change and growth. We must be fearless in recognising what we need to let go of and what must not slip away. We need to become leaders who can handle the trouble and discomfort associated with change and have the tenacity to remember the few new things that should be done as well as the things that we must continue to do'.

An illustration

Rowers row facing the stern(back) - with back to the future – important because recognising where we've come from encourages us to push forward to where we need to be.

Canoeists canoe facing forward - always pushing forward – they head for the white water with relish and a little fear but with a sense of excitement about the journey.

Kipling once said this, **'They that only England know, know not England.'**

Often the canoeists are the ones with the prophetic edge or those new to the church, who see with fresh eyes some aspect in the way the church needs to change. Of course their words won't be the only words or even the last words but they are nevertheless important words that help us navigate white water.

Antoine de Saint Exupery – published a collection of sayings called ‘Citadelle’, he said,

‘If you want to build a ship, don’t summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs and organise the work; teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean’.

The mainstream church in UK is too focussed on motivating its members to embrace the technicalities of shipbuilding without ever having first inspired them with a yearning to sail the high seas. The church that God will ensure prevails might disturb and frighten many of us but that is no reason not to seek it and pursue it and build it.

We’ve been so fortunate to have Chris Neal journey with us awhile. He loves white water canoeing and we’ve been blessed by his ministry to us.

He has disturbed us with a vision of what sort of community we need to become to help a world that is trying to navigate white water in a very shaky craft. A craft that is struggling to survive economic instability (picture of baby in paper saying they’ll be 23 years old before the country is out of debt), ecological and environmental uncertainty and a looming energy crises.

Chris believes that the church must become a prophetic voice speaking hope into a world of despair. Our community must actively

identify with the life of Jesus – being at home everywhere and nowhere
transform the secular society – by living on the margins of society
live highly communal lives –

These are some of the outcomes of becoming a missional community:

We must foster transforming discipleship
 Live incarnationally – being shaped by our context
 Explore evangelism as an integral part of mission
 Create spiritual, economic and social capital
 Commit ourselves to the local community

After the away day Chris encouraged us to draw together the themes that have been emerging, discuss them, pray about them and draw them together until they reflect what Christ's wants us to do. He suggested, that at this stage, we ought not to be too process driven(which risks imposing our will for the church over Christ's)and too passive(which risks not achieving any meaningful change). He summed up this dichotomy as 'being rather than doing' and advised us that we need to focus on people, not programmes, values, not structures, the vision, not the institution and to be world focussed not church focussed.

This is what we've been doing since January.

Met with ministry team/PCC to develop values statement.

Values statement

'We should be transparent and have family values, walking beside each other in solidarity. We wish to develop deep relationships which show compassion and value honesty so that we demonstrate noticeably different lives wherever we are. To be Christ centred, to seek God honestly, to trust each other with humility and respect, to give to each other generously and to bear with each patiently. To be welcoming and caring, nurturing and valuing each other, following the love and teaching of Jesus, and sharing it with all whom we meet. A depth of commitment to Jesus which grows from small groups meeting together to build up to go out into the world and be Christ like.

'Open to God nights' – to hear what God might have to say about the shape of things to come.

Chris Neal to meet with PCC/Ministry team on 6th May.

Decide how to include the rest of the Church in the ongoing process

Further headings

Youth Worker(substantial gift to help fund a youth worker)

Finances(healthy – thanks to Keith Harwood)

Andrew Pritchard(look forward to his arrival)

Madley Park(meet with Jigsaw attendees to agree a plan from September)

Greg/Gareth(training/thinking about ordained ministry)

Alpha(starting again in September)

Roger/Cyril(how fortunate we are to have two retired clergy of their calibre)