

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' Matthew 28:19&20.

The longer that I have the privilege of serving God in ordained ministry the more often I come back to those verses from Matthew's Gospel. As I share with people in our community, as I read the headlines on the news, as I wonder what our future will be as a country; those verses give me hope. If the Church of God is living out the great commission, and through that more people choose to live the way of Jesus Christ then as more people shape their lives in the way of God's kingdom the more God's kingdom will grow. The more God's kingdom grows the better place the world will be, without a doubt the Great Commission gives me hope.

As I looked back at my Minister's report from last year I reread stories of individuals lives being changed as they were served and ministered to through Trinity's mission and ministry. Without a doubt over throughout this year many people have again been impacted by Trinity, the care we offer and the activities we have provided. I am again so thankful to God for all that we do to serve each other and the community of Hexham.

As I thought more about this last year I was so encouraged to see the many ways in which we have stepped out of these walls and invited others to have an opportunity to discover God's love. We have done this through our care home services, our involvement with Hexham Holiday Club, the summer Bible Study, Open the Book Assemblies, The Christmas Market Stall, QE Christian Union, Youth Group Weekend Away and our involvement with the Abbey's Bishops Mission. Each of these opportunities to serve God have enabled us as a Church to live out the Great Commission.

The season of invitation in November 2018 was a time of great joy for me. To see us as a Church inviting others to events, services and activities where they could question, discover and explore who Jesus is was simply amazing. The testimonies of those invitational conversations showed us that God was indeed at work. Over the last few weeks we've started our Alpha, we have 13 guests taking part and many of them are coming to Alpha because of the invitations they were given in the autumn, for which I praise God.

The Church I believe exists for three things, to worship God, to grow as disciples who serve God and to tell others about the Good News of Jesus Christ. I believe that the Church growth plan which the Church Council agreed in the autumn and which is rooted in the Church vision will enable us to grow in these three areas. It is an ambitious plan, but it is one which came from listening to the whole Church, to seeking God in prayer and committing to what we believe God is asking of us. At the heart of the growth plan is the belief that Jesus' words to *'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'* are fundamental to who we are; not because we want to play a numbers game, but because we believe people's lives will be transformed if they discover for themselves the saving love of Jesus Christ.

The growth plan is without a doubt ambitious and it won't all happen overnight! If we are all committed to making it a reality, if we are all willing to say 'how can be involved?', 'what might God be asking of me?', 'what is the part God has for me to play?' then I believe God will guide us and show us how to making the plan a reality. I believe we will see more people coming to know Jesus and the world being more and more like God's kingdom. On a personal level when I asked to continue to serve in Tynedale for a further three years I felt called by God to help us have a greater focus on mission and evangelism and I believe the growth plan provides us with the framework to do that. I'm excited to play my part in making it a reality and I hope you are also excited to play your part.

As we look to the year ahead without a doubt the growth plan provides our focus as a Church. Alongside that I'd like to mention three other opportunities that we have before us:

- Firstly, each year Trinity gives away 10% of the money we receive through congregational giving and gift aid, approx. £10-£11k. We normally commit to give to charities for three years and seek to support a balance of local, national and international charities. This year is the end of our current three-year cycle and this will give us an opportunity to think again about which charities we would like to support. Please watch out later in the year for the chance to input into these discussions as the Outreach and Partnership Co-ordinating group who oversee the tithe are keen to hear ideas from the whole congregation.
- Secondly, like all Christian denominations over a number of years the Methodist Church has had conversations about sexuality, marriage and relationships. These conversations are important and are ones in which people hold many differing and strongly held beliefs rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ. They are conversations which impact individuals lives and sadly over the years many have felt excluded by the Church through the conversations not least, but not exclusively, those who are members of the LGBTQI+ community.

At this year's Methodist Conference, the conference will receive recommendations from the marriage and relationships task group relating to Same Sex Marriage, which will then be consulted on within the wider Church during the church year 2019-20. Ahead of the Conference the Newcastle Methodist District, of which we are a part, are providing the opportunity for a number of conversations where people can share their thoughts, beliefs and hopes on this topic. There are five conversations across the district on different days at different times. One of the conversations will be held here at Trinity on Tuesday 12th March at 7:30pm.

I know from conversations with individuals within Trinity that like many Churches there are different views, thoughts and questions around marriage and relationships within our Church. I believe however, that because we are united in our belief in Jesus Christ and his great commission we can and will engage in these conversations well, now and in the future, holding ourselves together as one even though we may hold contradictory convictions.

I encourage you to take the opportunity to be involved in the conversations either here at Trinity or one of the others in the district so that you are able to share your views and to hear the views of others.

- Thirdly, some of you but not all of you will be aware that in April, May and June this year I will be taking my first sabbatical, a period of three months when I will have the opportunity to rest from my normal patterns of ministry to take time with God and with my family.

I am excited about my sabbatical and the renewal that I believe God will bring through it. I am equally excited by what God will do amongst you whilst I am away. I believe God will do great things and I will be excited to hear about them when I return. I want to say thank you now, to those who will cover for me and those who God will use whilst I'm away. I will share more before I go of what I will be doing but for now wanted to let you know and share my excitement for what God will do for Tara, Jethro and I but also my excitement for what God will do here.

I believe these are three important opportunities for us as a Church and I hope you will share in them in the months ahead.

Before I close I'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who enables Trinity to serve God. I'd like to thank our Church Stewards and Staff for all that they do so often unseen. In particular I'd like to thank four people today, Anna Vogelberg who steps down as a Steward and Pastoral Secretary a role she has done so well over the last four years, to Sandra Innes who has stepped down as Chair of the Outreach and Partnership Co-ordinating Group and who has really grown that work over the last few years, to Peter Wells who has served as a steward for six years and been a constant support to me and many others in that time and to Alan Dentith who after nearly 13 years service and many unseen hours caring for this Church has stepped down as the Chair of the Resources Co-ordinating Group. Thank you to you all for all that you have done and will continue to do for God in this place.

I began with the words of Jesus, *to go and make disciples*, which gives me so much encouragement and hope. As we begin our new year I pray that this verse will continue to be our foundation as a Church, that it will inspire us all to play our part in making the growth plan a reality. I pray that by letting this be our foundation we will see God do amazing things which transform our lives and the lives of others.

*We have a gospel to proclaim
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.*

*Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.*