

It has been good today to hear from you all and from George the things of our Church life that we can celebrate, the opportunities God is placing before us and the challenges we face. Having asked you to share your celebrations, opportunities and challenges I decided that for my report this year I would do the same.

Celebrations

There is much to celebrate today and so often I find myself thanking God for the many many blessings we have received as a Church, but I asked you to keep to three so I will:

1. **Worship** - it was just over a year ago that we made some significant decisions about our patterns of worship at Trinity and in particular introduced the worship leading teams of Service Leader, Music Leader and Preacher for our morning services. Whilst I recognise like any transition there were some challenges to begin with through this change our worship has deepened over the last twelve months, our service leaders and music leaders have grown with God and with the congregation. I regularly receive feedback that people have met with God and been blessed by worship and our series on stories in November touched individuals deeply. I am delighted that three more Worship Leaders will join the team in the coming weeks having completed the training course last autumn and I ask you to encourage them as they begin to share in leading services. I pray that our worship continues to grow and develop for God's glory.
2. **Families** - one of my biggest joys over the last 12 months have been the number of baptism and thanksgiving services we've had, almost one a month for the last 6 months and we have another one coming in April. All of the children we have welcomed into God's family are from families who worship here at Trinity week by week some of whom are amongst the 13 new members we welcomed last year - a way if slipping in a 4 celebration! These baptisms and thanksgivings are a testimony of our churches ministry to children, young people and families which I celebrate.
3. **Alpha** - we have just begun our Alpha journey again this year and like so many years we've never known how many people will come but we have 7 people who are coming to Alpha to find out more about Jesus. This year almost all our guests are new to Church or don't yet go to Church which is exactly why we run Alpha. As we heard in December Alpha has such an impact on people's lives and is so central to living out our vision statement that *more people know of God's love*. Please pray for Alpha and for God to bless those who are coming.

Amongst many blessings Worship, Families and Alpha are my three celebrations.

Opportunities

As a minister I believe strongly that one of my key tasks is to 'keep watch' for what God is doing, where is God touching people's lives, where is God inviting us to join in with what God is doing so that we can fulfil our God given vision further. My three opportunities therefore are areas where I see God is already at work and inviting us to join in:

1. **Fellowship** - it was wonderful last year to welcome 13 new members of the Church family here at Trinity. When we grow as a Church it's important to get to know each other well as people and as followers of Jesus. We need to get to know each other socially, to pray together, to

worship together. It is important to grow as brothers and sisters in Christ together so that we can care for each other and so we can serve God together. I think we have an opportunity before us to get to know each other more and I hope we can take that opportunity in the coming year.

2. **Connecting to Growing** - you'll know that in our Church vision statement we use three key words, *Connecting, Growing, Living*. I've noticed over the last few months that we have a growth in people connecting with Trinity, we have some new faces at Tuesday coffee, parents and babies is thriving, the Swish and Christmas Craft evenings brought new people into this building, there are new faces in the knitting group, our HT3 group for middle school age children in thriving with families who don't yet come to Church, at the Nativity and Christmas Day services we had many families in the congregation who had been invited through these different activities. **THIS IS GOOD NEWS!** The opportunity is of course to help those who connect with us to start to discover more of who Jesus is, to start growing in faith as well as connecting with Trinity. There are different ways we could do this and that needs thought and prayer, but it's a really important opportunity to help more people know Jesus.
3. **Prayer** - this may seem obvious and we are very much a praying Church and the Advent prayer room shows that. Yet I have been convicted in my Spirit since Christmas that we need to come before God in prayer even more in the coming months. I think some of that will be in response to the challenges I'm about to move onto but it's more than that, I believe God has things to share with us, to bless us with and to challenge us with. I hope that we may be able to focus on prayer in Lent so please look out for more news about opportunities to pray together as a Church.

So along with all the opportunities you see, which I believe are very much of God my three are Fellowship, Connecting to Growing and Prayer. All of which I know the Church Growth Team will consider how we respond to, along with the opportunities you see when it meets this week.

Challenges

In many ways it's easy to find the challenges and even easier to hear the grumbles but I purposely put these last after celebrations and opportunities as our challenges are by no means the biggest factor of our Church life.

1. **Confidence** - do we have confidence in the Gospel? Do we believe that the God we worship who in Jesus offers us new and eternal life has the power to transform us, transform others and transform the world? Do we have confidence that the Holy Spirit is amongst us and at work with us? Do we have confidence that the Holy Spirit has the power to break into dark places and lavish God's light in the darkness? Do we?

It is so easy to get caught up in our normal rhythms of life, to get caught up in busyness, to limit God's potential to our horizons. If we are going to walk with God in the opportunities we have before us we need to be renewed in our confidence in the power of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to let that Spirit pour out on us and fill us with confidence of God that we have when we are children of God. For when we move forward confident in what God can do, not what we can do, then anything is possible. I believe our praying will reveal more of God's power to us and build our confidence in God.

2. **Participation** - one of our biggest challenges at the moment is with participation in the different activities and responsibilities that a Church our size has. But, this is not an appeal for people to do more, it is acknowledgement of the challenge that we face as a family at the moment. We have people facing challenges in their own lives or their families lives, people who are caring for elderly parents and often grandchildren at the same time. People are getting older (!), the

average retirement age is higher than it used to be, people are being expected to travel further for work or are experiencing more pressure at work. Other charities and organisations we serve need more of our time too. All of these realities for so many of you has an impact on what we are able to do as a Church and that's a challenge we need to be aware of and to respond to appropriately with God, it's not something we need to feel guilty about or beat ourselves up over.

It is a challenge which is constantly before the church stewards and means at times we have to make decisions to do less than we hope we might be able to. It means that however many good opportunities we have identified this morning we might not be able to turn them all into reality immediately as they will all need people. In practical terms this challenge means after approaching a number of people and appealing to the congregation for prayerful suggestions or willing offers we won't have a full complement of six church stewards this year. Although I have every confidence in the team of five I hope we will appoint in the a few minutes. For the same reasons, I am currently chairing the resources co-ordinating group as we haven't been able to replace Alan who stepped down a year ago - but I am hopeful of resolving this by the Church Council. We don't have a full team every week at Tuesday coffee yet we have more people coming to drink the coffee, our staff team find themselves willingly undertaking tasks which are not in their job descriptions and many people go above and beyond for God every week in the life of this Church which is simply amazing.

That list is not in any way supposed to be a guilt trip to those here this morning and I repeat it is not an appeal for people to do more. It is an honest acknowledgment of a reality, of a challenge, of I believe some spiritual opposition (in the broadest sense) to the blessings that we have seen and the stepping out in faith we have taken. It is a challenge for us to respond to in prayer and to have confidence of God's grace in leading us forward.

3. **Finance** - in a few moments John our Church Treasurer will share with us his financial report. This year it has more challenges in it than it has had for a number of years. As John will explain there are good reasons for this, many because of the excellent ministry and mission that we do for God. John will say more but I wanted to say as the minister, that finance is a challenge this year, please listen carefully and respond as you are able. I am, however, confident that through John's diligence as our treasurer, our prayerful generosity as a Church and God's provision it is a challenge which can be overcome.

Three challenges, not always easy to share but they are those which God has placed on my heart. None of them are I believe unsurmountable, all of them you will notice I have said we should respond to primarily with prayer as well as action.

I believe, God has given us much to celebrate this year, that God will lead us forward to serve through the opportunities and help us through the challenges. I am confident that when I stand here next year there will be much to celebrate, much to rejoice in and undoubtedly some new opportunities from God to join in with. To close, some words from St Paul:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)