

AGM Sermon Address given by the Rev Nicki McNelly 24th November 2019

In his address to Synod, Bishop John challenged all of us, at our AGM's, to describe the last year under the five headings from our Growing Together process. And also, what are we planning to do under the same headings for the forthcoming year? So, this is my attempt to do so. I hope you too, like the Colossians, may be prepared to endure everything with patience, as this is a bit longer than I usually preach.

If you remember, the acronym was SEEDS:

The first heading is Serving our communities.

This past year, the charities we have supported are – Fresh Start / Trinity Food Bank / Support for single parents / Leprosy Mission / Christian Aid / SSAFA / Poppy Scotland / Aberlour / Hopscotch / Dad's Rock / CAP / Project Embabazi and the Bishop's Lent Appeal – my apologies if I've forgotten any. And I know many of you support charities personal to you.

I have met, or worked with Oxfams Community Church / the Church of Scotland / Merchiston Castle School / The Army / Getting it Right For Forces Families Education Committee / Cottage Homes / Cairdean / Thorburn / Braidburn, Oxfams and Bonaly Schools and The Colinton Inn.

We are very fortunate that our hall is used every day by a number of groups and individuals within our community. This provides us with an income, while giving them decent premises at a reasonable price.

More recently, local people have also used the church for meetings, which has given those, who do not go to church, an opportunity to see inside ours. It makes me smile every time I see their reaction, as they are in awe of the beauty of the building and the atmosphere, the holiness, found within it.

Having the church open most days also gives people a chance to pop in for a moment of peace, for whatever reason, as well as our beautiful gardens that are frequented by many throughout the drier months. We are so lucky to have volunteer gardeners to keep it looking as it does and I am very grateful for all they do.

Within our church community, we have 8 pastoral visitors going to 13 homes on a regular basis and there have been 117 home communions received throughout the year. My thanks to those who give their time to visit others.

Margaret Holmes and her team give us excellent social opportunities – coffee after services, Burns Supper, Soup lunches and more. Thank you all for the service you give to the church.

We've also celebrated some big birthdays and anniversaries this year. Make sure you let me know if you have one coming up, as the church family like to celebrate with you too.

Within the church building we have been looking at ways of making it more welcoming for those in wheelchairs.

We cannot move the front pews, as they are listed. The area beside the font is obvious area to use, but this causes difficulties when there is a baptism. I am in discussion with the Grass Market project to see if they can make us a portable font to be used at the front of the church, so nobody in a wheelchair is made to feel uncomfortable or displaced when there is a baptism. We also have to acknowledge that as the congregation ages, there will be more people with walking frames. If they

are too big to be kept in the pew, they can be placed in the south transept, as long as they are not blocking the fire exit. A member of the welcome team will help you to do this.

The second is Engaging all generations.

We may have a small Sunday School but we certainly have committed volunteers who look after them well. Thanks to Megan and all who help her in ensuring the young folk are looked after and taught the Gospel in a way that is relevant to them.

The youth group meets each month to discuss the bible. My thanks to Joan for her input in this. We've had some interesting talks and tasty pizzas.

We have been trialling various locations for a play area for the youngest of our children.

I confess, I was reminded that the current place was done illegally, as I hadn't completed Canon 35 to remove the pews. Father forgive me, I do not know what I am doing! I have asked for forgiveness for my error and submitted Canon 35.

One of our best outreach services for families and children is the Crib Service. Last year we had over 120 people in church and we hope to repeat that this year. It may only be one service but we really don't know what seeds are being sown in their time with us. People delivering leaflets around the houses listing our Christmas services helped with this. I hope we can do the same again this year.

The Vestry has spent the last year discussing how to best continue this ministry to youngsters and families and have now put together a job description for a Children's, Youth and Family Worker with input from Megan, who has done this role for so long. We are hoping this post will be filled before Easter next year, giving Megan the opportunity to stand down after many years of service.

Going to the other end of engaging all generations, we continue our weekly Thursday afternoon services, which are led by a number of volunteers from here, along with Rolf. Sadly, numbers are dropping and I just want to remind you that everyone is welcome to these services. You do not have to be a certain age. With so many different people taking the services, you can be assured of a variety of worship and topics. I am very grateful for their help and those who drive and provide refreshments.

And A Brew and a Blether caters for the community inside and outside our church, as they offer a place to meet, socialise, be entertained and enjoy lovely refreshments each month. We are blessed to have people willing to give up their time and do this each month – thank you.

Thirdly, enabling ministry

We are involved in a rejuvenated Area Council, one of only a few actually working in the diocese. A great place for sharing resources and good practice.

I must thank Margaret Temple for her enthusiasm and wisdom in helping this happen as the secretary, and as the chair stands down for maternity leave, I now find I am the new chair.

St. Cuthbert's is a church with many people with different gifts, offering ministry of one sort or another. We can see that in the number of reports written in the annual booklet. We see it each Sunday, from the sound controllers, to all who serve at the altar. The flowers, the choir and Philip who help lead worship through the beauty of music. Gavin, who checks all the lights are working and unblocks our drains. Those who make sure our bins are out on the correct day and those who control the heating. So many people doing so much; I just can't thank you enough.

We give thanks to Bob Bent and Bob Pritchard, whose ministry was looking after this building, along with the rectory for so many years.

Now they are retired (and having received the St. Cuthbert's Award) a new group of volunteers are ministering in this area. My thanks to Ross, Joan and Iain for offering their services to follow the two Bobs.

Then we have those who lead different groups, such as Shalom, R&R and Open Forum – all ministering in different situations enabling people to meet God in different ways.

We are helping the Scottish Episcopal Institute in hosting a student each year as they train for ordination. Harriet, now ordained (and engaged) last year, and we welcome Lesley this year. It's a huge privilege to be involved in their formation for ministry.

I have been in discussion with Anne Tomlinson, Principal of the SEI to look at other ways we can support them as a church. One thing we are discussing, which will go to vestry in January, is giving a grant each year to fund a student to attend New College. Initially, maybe for five years and then it will be reassessed.

We welcomed Margaret Dineley as NSM in August and value her contribution to the ministry of our church.

With all the support I receive from you, and Marie in the office, I am enabled in my ministry. Thank you.

And fourth, developing disciples.

Everything we do here is part of developing disciples. Sunday and weekly services, sacristy work, prayer groups, discussion groups, social events, property, gardening, flower arranging, music, volunteering and visiting, as everything is done for love of and service to God.

We then have to transfer that from inside our walls to going out of the door into the community. How can we expect new people to come to church, if they haven't been before and don't know why they should come? It is up to us, that's you and me, to tell them why and invite them in.

Which leads on nicely to number five.

Sharing Faith

We have to share our faith, share our love, share how lucky we are to have this beautiful building in which we meet as a family, a community of loving Christians. We have to share that, at St. Cuthbert's, we are inclusive, we are loving, we are welcoming and we like to have fun and we like to have God. We have to share our faith and share an invitation to others to join us.

Our faith is witnessed in how we live our lives. So live them well so others can see why we follow Christ the King – and maybe if we witness well, others will be curious and come through our doors.

As for what we are planning to do under the same headings for the forthcoming year.

It's not easy, as you all do everything so well, so please accept my most sincere thanks for everything you do and I hope you will continue to do so.

As a vestry, we have been looking at making sure we keep the church and hall fit for purpose following the space audit. Hopefully we will have something to share with you by Easter and Martin will tell you more in his report.

In our worship, I know it must be disappointing for the musical people in the congregation not to sing a psalm each week, but there are some of us who do not like to sing and enjoy actually saying psalms. For some it makes it easier to pray the psalms when they are said, as you have more time to focus on the words, for others it is more difficult, as they are not being sung. I cannot please all of you all of the time but I can try to differ the way psalms are used, so each week, at least some are happy.

Philip is looking at sung responsorial psalms and some weeks, we sing a hymn based on a psalm, so we may have four different ways of approaching the psalms; sung, said, responsorial and a hymn. Maybe, when we have a fifth Sunday and there are enough people in the choir to do so, they could sing, while the congregation listen.

To end, for those I have forgotten to thank; I apologise. Just be assured, if you a member of St. Cuthbert's, I am very, very grateful for everything and anything you do in the name of Christ.

I am a mere human being, called by God – as I am, doing my best and acknowledging my weaknesses. I know I will never make everyone happy no matter how hard I try. We are all different spiritually, in how we like to worship, in our prayer life, in our music choices.

But please remember, we are not here to be pleased, we are here to worship God and love each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. As we all know, the greatest commandment is this, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

So, in the words of Mother Teresa, 'let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love'. Amen.