

APCM Vicars report April 2009 – April 2010

Part 1 His-story

I am grateful to God and you that this has been a year of mission. ECB should be encouraged for the amount of outreach that has been attempted. We had a 'Mission Event' designed to take people a step further in their understanding of the gospel called 'Cash 'n Curry'. There was a great turn out and although the one sign up for the Alpha changed his mind, people heard that Jesus taught a great deal about money. We prepared for the big town wide mission with 3 groups doing 'Lost for Words' and at least one of you found their tongue and invited many to various mission events and to ECB. We managed to squeeze in an Alpha course for 4 guests and this resulted in initial commitments to Christ. We took our opportunity with Carols in the Pub and had perhaps the best attended one yet! Radio Oxford asked to lead a devotional broadcast from ECB in January this year. Healing on the Streets continues faithfully EVERY WEEK and there is a report from Stan & Joyce that should give us much cause for praise and thanks to our wonderful Lord.

Love Bicester

The Mission week to Bicester between the 19th and 28th March - 'Love Bicester' followed a Pastor's meeting early last year. The motive for the mission was a strong and mutual feeling among the Pastors that God's time was here for a concentrated mission to the town long before the name 'Love Bicester' was agreed. Meetings were set up with Ian Biscoe who was a Church Army evangelist with proven gifting, using 'Through Faith Missions' and Michael Green who came with an enthusiastic and young team from Wycliffe Hall. Michael and team was to be the principal missionary for Bicester and 'Through Faith Missions' are tackling the villages. A varied programme was quickly agreed to reach people on their own ground. Cars, Rugby, Movies, Avatars, Business people, supper parties, gospel choir, a famous Bishop, the Dawkins factor and a youth programme in 'the Lounge' put together by the youth with help from Highway, Salvation Army and Kyle's group. This was climaxed with a tent on Pingle field with lights and sound and rapping etc. The hunger and longing we all feel is for a widespread turning to Christ in our town resulting in transformed lives and a transformed community. Although response cards are limited in what they tell of people's hearts, at least 60 people were moved enough to ask for more contact, and many of those indicated they were interested in joining the all church Alpha course started on Thursday 15th of this month. The March of Witness capped the outreach with another moving dramatisation of the Passion of Christ.

Ready for Growth?

The PCC also felt moved to see the Church reach out with the gospel to increase in size and in spiritual maturity. A comprehensive and critical report was written by Tony Shields following meetings with various Church Family members just before Love Bicester and I will give copies of it for any who would like to read it and test its conclusions. One of the other growth initiatives from this was the desire to try another fresh expression of worship – the first meeting being tonight.

Sri Lanka.

It is almost 2 years since our visit to Sri Lanka and the dream of our sending a team of young people to do a short term mission there has yet to be realised. One of Sriyamal's key helpers has died and left the church looking after a teenage orphan. This orphan has become a young leader in worship and other ministry and has been mentored by Sriyamal. The country has seen frequent attacks on Christian Communities and recently a pastor had his church and his house burned down. This does not deter Sriyamal or his faithful leaders. Please pray for them and pray how we can encourage them with another visit with some kind of mission under Sriyamal's leadership.

Development of Building

The need to take faith and the dead line for making a substantial start on the building project spurred us into instructing the consultants to prepare tender documentation and seek tenders. This culminated in Building Control permission, Working Drawings, a Bill of Quantities and the lowest tender from Life Build Solutions Ltd of £1,298,300. The highest tender was £1,569,253. With adjustments to the exclusions in Life Builds Tender and with the professional fees added the total cost of the scheme would be £1,692,283. A useable next phase of construction with some value engineering and temporary omission of finished first floor accommodation could probably be realised within a one million budget.

Fees to date have been in the order of £140,198. A foundation contract with Life Build was let to make the substantial start (£40,313) and to take a step of faith similar to Joshua and the invading Israelites. The whole church met in June and decided to proceed hoping for a complete building following our faith step. We had a second gift day for those who may not have been part of the church for the first gift day. (Approx 13k?) The support of the Diocese for a Christmas present to ECB from every church in the archdeaconry resulted in approximately £10,000. The Church has raised a total of nearly £400,000 including the last pledges.

I hosted a breakfast with Cherwell District Council & Bicester Town Council which resulted in a pledge for £10,000 when it can top up a useable phase of the building. We have a similar pledge from WREN for up to £50,000 when this too will enable us to complete a habitable structure.

The disappointments in funding have been the refusal of TOE (hoped for £50,000) the unrealistic outcome of the Government Community Builders Grants that turn out to be not grants at all but loans that would require ECB to become a commercial enterprise, and our principle advisors were using London based examples for proposed loan applications and totally unrealistic 3 year repayment plans. So far all major Trusts we have approached have refused grants either temporarily or permanently. The list is not exhausted.

The Church are perplexed as to the lack of Diocesan support with such vast sums of money reported in its charitable accounts and with any consecrated building entering their ownership anyway. If the Diocese matched our £400,000 realised to date, the church could seek finance for say £200,000 for a useable phase of construction. I have a visit booked to see Bishop Colin tomorrow morning.

We await the Lord's timing in the final large tranches of money needed to actually build. The 4 strong values that accompanied a prophecy for our building from Steve Beegoo (01.09.05) can be seen amongst the leadership of our church.

1. Bible believing – this year we accomplished a walk through the whole Bible in 12 units. We continue to try and live by the Word of God.
2. Prayer – although not always brilliantly attended – prayer is persistent and steady both corporately and in the cells.
3. The practice of the Presence of God is not something we can manipulate or control – but there have been notable times when the Lord has revealed His presence amongst us – and we thirst for more.
4. Gospel outreach – already much covered in this report.

These values, according to the prophecy, will hold up the roof!

Part 2 Looking forward.

The Amplified Bible translates Proverbs 29:18 “Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish; but he who keeps the law [of God, which includes that of man] – blessed (happy, fortunate and enviable) is he.” [with cross references to 1 Samuel 3:1; Amos 8:11 – 12]

We have been following our vision “Ensuring all find Christ's love and Become disciples” in the many and varied outreaches this year. Christ's love includes Christ's vision and He stated this at the outset of His public ministry [Luke 4:18 – 19] There is His love for preaching Good News to the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed and the grace period of the Lord's favour which He inaugurated. Jesus has also pointed us to a specific word of prophecy in a tongue given on the 10th January this year. This is a word of huge comfort – God is in control – He lives and He reigns – He knows what He is doing. He loves us – easily forgotten and not always believed in hearts and minds of some of the family. It is also a word of challenge as He asks to be let in and transform our church and our lives – how exciting is that?

Why is the Building helpful to carry out the Lord's vision for us?

1. Because He has initiated the whole thing.
2. The restriction to growth on Sunday mornings will be removed.
3. We are fighting the building we are in with poor acoustics, sound transference from the babies, distractions from our squeaky chairs and visual focus on gym bars or irrelevant mosaic, and a major set up/dismantling every Sunday.
4. We will have a tool to carry out ministry from an inviting and magnetic base such as: -
 - A place where we try and accomplish ‘Man's chief end.’ (See Worship Team report)
 - Attracting the school gate crowd to coffee and friendship – and on to the gospel.
 - A base for Mums and tots group and on to perhaps ‘Messy Church’ and or after school clubs
 - A place for youth to hang out and chill!
 - A place for new initiatives such as Café Church to reach those unimpressed with structured church services.
 - A base for a fully fledged CAP centre
 - A base for a Food bank branch and or a baby ‘shop’.
 - A place where the vicar can have a ‘clinic’ and an office.
 - A place for hospitality outreach (and not just Alpha).
 - A place for the neighbouring community to ‘own’.
 - A place for ‘one stop’ weddings complete with reception and celebration.
 - A place for baptisms and powerful testimony.
 - A beacon of God's provision to the watching world.

Now the lack of a building is not going to stop us building the people of God. We test the Lord's guidance on a second (third – fourth) worship service in what accommodation we can hire. We can still do Alpha in the home. We can do ‘film nights’ with DVDs in the home. We can do supper parties in the home. One of our members has a vision for a HITH team – healing in the home – James 5:14 – 16. We still look to the Lord to speak to us both from His word and from prophecy. I am looking forward to some teaching on prophecy I hope we can see in ECB. We still hope for more testimonies of signs, wonders and miracles confirming His word to us.

The task is huge. The Lord is bigger than our task. We are a busy little church. We need to stop and listen to His priorities and His leading so that we are busy about His work which will never crowd out listening time and never be too heavy for us to carry (Matthew 11:28 – 30).

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