

A few words from the Vicar

Last month, I mentioned discussions with neighbouring clergy about the possibility of our joining together to offer more to you this Lent.

Well, we are planning the following:

1. Christ Church Walshaw are offering an informal and relaxed Lent course entitled '*Hebrews... it's all about Jesus*'. This is on Saturday mornings 10-11am at the Victoria Walshaw, 29th February to 4th April. Coffee and croissants available.
2. At Christ Church Ainsworth we have *Lent Night Prayer*, 7.30-8pm on Tuesday evenings, 3rd to 31st March, plus Monday to Wednesday during Holy week. Based around Compline, this will be a time for quiet reflection and prayer.
3. St Andrew's Radcliffe are hosting a *Lent Lunch*, 12-1pm on Wednesdays 4th March to 8th April. Join them for soup, bread and a walk through the Passion story. (£1 donation towards lunch optional.)

So, between us, we have a lot on offer to help you enjoy a holy Lent.

Changing tack, long before my ordination, growing the Church has been a subject close to my heart. Therefore, it is pleasing to report that, following a gradual decline over several years, our average weekly attendance grew between October 2018 and October 2019.

With our Sunday congregations still in gradual decline, it doesn't take much to work out that this growth arises entirely from the success of Mid-Week Praise.

So, we have something to celebrate!

Yet we have some work to do, because there is no reason why our Sunday congregations should not grow also. Yes, our age

profile is a major cause of this gradual decline. Indelicate of me to mention it, I know, but increasing frailty and the Grim Reaper are bound to take their toll. Yet growing our Sunday congregations is not just possible, it is essential if we are to continue to thrive.

I am glad to say that Mike Starkey (Church Growth Officer for Manchester Diocese) was one of the keynote speakers at a recent Deanery Awayday. He explained that the approach to growth in our diocese can be summed up in two words: Fresh and Refresh.

'Fresh' is about planting new churches outside the parish structure. For example, an ex-Chinese restaurant in Rochdale town centre is earmarked as the site of one new church. Other churches are being planted on hard to reach estates through the Antioch Network.

'Refresh' is about supporting and equipping parishes like ours to become more intentional about growth, to become more focused upon mission, and to become more outward facing.

Mike also shared some ideas for growing local churches. More about this next month.

In the meantime, here is something you can do to grow Christ Church. Invite a friend or neighbour (husband or wife?) to join us for worship. Give them a lift, make sure you sit with them (so they do not worry about when to stand or which page we're on). Then invite them again the following week. If all of you do this, we could double the size of our congregations within a year!

Every Blessing

Dave