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GROW CARE SERVE SHARE

Church Family News

Advent 2013

The season of Advent is one of hope; hope, as we look forward to remembering and celebrating the fact that God chose to come and share our humanity with us, with all its sufferings and frailties as well as its joys. We also look forward to the ultimate hope when Jesus will return, restoring creation to a place of peace and justice which He always intended it to be.

This Advent I am filled with hope as I reflect on the life of our church in these past months; here are a few reasons for my hope.

- This is the first time I have experienced a sustained period of ill-health and so the first time I have experienced the response of God's people in such a situation. It has been overwhelming and humbling. I have been deeply touched by your love and prayers and in a very real way, carried by them. The practical love shown has been amazing; cards, notes, flowers, meals arriving just when needed, as well as the loving space to be left to get well. This is church, the way God meant it to be, a family in which we love each other. I know I'm not alone in receiving such love and care from this church family. What I now know, in a new way, is that even the smallest act of kindness is multiplied as it is received in a way that the giver may have no idea of. In John 13:35 Jesus says that by our love for one another we will show to the world that we are his disciples. As we continue to love one another and love our community I hope that Jesus will increasingly be made known in Bathford and beyond.
- As I look at the transformation of our church building with the completion of the South Aisle (I couldn't resist coming over to see this!) I am filled with hope because we are not a church afraid to engage with change for the sake of the gospel. We now have a flexible area in church, a welcoming space, a space to experiment, a space for hospitality and one we hope will increase the possibilities of the way we, and at times the community we serve, can use our building. The hopes we had for the South Aisle would never have become a reality without the sacrificial giving of money, time and talents of so many. We are especially grateful to our fabric team for the hours of work put into this project and the practical work of John Smart, Robert Wolsey and others which has saved us thousands of pounds.

- I have hope as I see our young people week by week in church, particularly in light of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey's recent warning that 'Christianity is just a generation away from extinction in Britain unless churches make a dramatic breakthrough in attracting young people back to the faith'. I am excited about our appointment of Ryan and his enthusiasm to help our young people grow into confident Christians. I firmly believe, now more than ever, that the appointments of two staff members, Ryan and Barbara, will help us to grow as a church. This has been a significant step of faith for us as a church which, in itself fills me with hope. Equally, faith is always costly, sometimes in a literal financial sense, and we will face the challenge in the new year to increase our giving to ensure we sustain this commitment; however, again, I have a firm hope that we will rise to this challenge.
- Bill Hybels, pastor of one of the largest churches in the USA, says that 'the local church is the hope of the world'. As I look at our church I'm inspired to believe this bold statement. Our focus this year has been to grow, and from what I have seen and what people have told me, I know there has been growth in so many ways, and for that we thank God. Indeed, even as a consequence of my absence, people have grown as they have taken on additional tasks and responsibilities. With decreasing clergy numbers, the wider Church is increasingly recognising the imperative for Christians to be enabled into the gifts and ministry God sees for them. I am filled with hope and optimism as I see that happen here. I look forward to more people taking risks and working out God's call for them, both within the church and in their wider lives, during the coming year.

Advent, like Lent, is a time of spiritual preparation. Each day during Advent I plan to light a candle for just five minutes to reflect on Jesus coming as the Light of the world, on our hope in Him and the hope He places in us to continue His work. I plan to pray in hopeful expectation that His light will shine in even the darkest of places. Will you as a church family join me in doing the same?

I have missed being with you immensely but I hope very much to be back with you in the New Year. Until then I pray that you will know the hope of Christ in your hearts this Advent and Christmas.

With my love, prayers and gratitude for this Church Family

Jane