

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

The year ahead – Joss Bray

6.4.14

Looking forward to the next year:

Lots of P's!

Principles

Let's not forget our church strap line – love God, love each other and serve the community. Serving the community can be expressed in many ways and includes helping the poor and needy, the lonely, the depressed and ill etc. Also we are called to be witnesses to Jesus and our faith in him in the world – so that will be part of what we do. People need to hear the good news of Jesus, being set free, forgiven, having hope and a purpose.

We are not serving God because we are compelled by rules and commands, but compelled by the love that God showed us first in Jesus. Out of gratefulness of being saved from the consequences of our sin and because we want to follow Jesus and therefore do the things he did.

These are some of the principles that we want to stick to.

So what about some other P's that are important to us?

Prophecies

Remember prophecies and scriptures we have received as a church - these inform and drive our direction.

Luke prophesied this at our first ever meeting a year ago:

I had a picture of a marathon track with thousands of people either side. But specifically the finish line. Over the finish line was an archway which was the gate of heaven. Beyond the gate was where the thousands of people were standing. In front of the gate were only six people - the beginning of Gateway Church - and they were cheering. They were cheering runners through the gate, the finish line. Their cheers may have been quiet alone but they were joined by those of the thousands of people behind the gate, in heaven, past the finish line. It was a huge roaring of cheers. As at first one or two ran through the gate - like the lead runners - more and more followed. People also joined the six people in front of the gate until more and more were cheering the runners through. On the banner above the gate it was written: Start and Finish. Because that's the deal, Jesus is the start and the finish - where heaven meets earth, that's where gateway church is.

Passion

So what is the passion that God has given you? What are the gifts he has given to you – there will be at least one. What is the part of the body of Christ that you are supposed to be? Is there something that burns in you that we need to hear about?

It is no mistake that God has brought us together, first to be the family of God and then to work together for his kingdom. He hasn't given you gifts and passions by accident – do not be backward in coming forward about this.

It may be that whatever it is needs some planning and time to do properly – but that is no reason not to bring it up – otherwise we may miss what God wants us to be doing as a church.

People

Who will God bring to us? It could be either through personal contact, publicity, working with the poor and needy – or people coming back to church after being away.

We need to help them feel at home and loved and also recognise that they will have God given gifts and abilities and passions that will help build the church too.

No one is discounted from giving their lives to God and following Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of heaven is near – if Saul of Tarsus could get in – anyone can – even the most unexpected people. I think that this is vitally important to take on board.

People may appear to be opposed to the church – but God can change that around – he has already done it here.

Personalities

This year will be a challenge for us – we have had a honeymoon period where things are exciting and hopeful and we are encouraged by growth. Now, over the next year, the danger is that we get irritated by each other, annoyed at lack of progress in our areas of passion and become increasingly aware of each others failings. It is not just a danger – it absolutely will happen in some way!

The good news is that this is normal because we are not perfect – this may be a shock to some people but we still sin. The bible says we are being transformed but it takes time!

The difference for Jesus's church is how we deal with it – and that is a subject for a whole discussion. That is why there is so much teaching in the New Testament letters about the way we should treat each other.

For now – let's be aware of it and ask God to give us patience and humility in dealing with each other – not

counting ourselves better than anyone else and remembering we are forgiven sinners as well.

Participation

It was really encouraging at the Christ Central conference last week when we it was reinforced that there is not a distinction between the sacred and secular.

This is God's world and we are meant to be in it – although not of it. We are in communities – living, working, serving, learning, and that is exactly where God has put us to be witnesses for him and to tell people that there is a better way – a better kingdom.

This also an outworking of our “serve the community” motto – it's not just about what we do as a church together, but what we do where we are individually.

Remember we are ambassadors for Christ in whatever we do – whether it is good or bad!

Power

So, to do all this – to be effective ambassadors in the world and serve our communities, to love each other as Jesus wants us to, and to love God with all our hearts minds and bodies – we need help.

Thankfully, God has himself provided this. Remember that Jesus said that he wouldn't leave us alone but would send a helper a counsellor – the Holy Spirit. Remember also that we are supposed to be filled with the Spirit – to be continually filled – because we leak.

He is the same spirit as in Jesus - who was able to do amazing things and love in extraordinary ways. We should

be doing the same things – and greater things according to Jesus!

Prayer and fasting

Jesus was clear that his disciples would pray and fast. They did it in the New Testament church. Again this is a subject for another discussion. But you don't have to wait for that! Hopefully all of us will pray already and several of us will fast and can testify to what God has done we do. Soon, I envisage us being a bit more organised and fasting with a specific focus that the whole church can get behind. City Church has done this and it seems to work.

Plans

Continue to meet here until overflowing! Then consider a move to the Community Hall in Shilbottle. God seems to be preparing a way for us in that – so that's encouraging.

We don't want to lose the family and community feel we have together – and especially not the eating together!

But as we heard recently – growth means losing some things and gaining other things. It does not mean just more of exactly the same. And we need to be ready for that. After all Jesus said "I will build my church".

So all our plans are provisional on God opening the way for them and giving us passion and boldness and confidence in Him to step out in faith. On the one hand we mustn't fall into the trap of planning everything down to the last detail – and on the other hand, not doing enough planning so that what we end up doing doesn't honour God and is ineffective and wastes time.

It is so important to hear God through prayer, each other, the bible and prophecy and apostolic input. We do not want to be spending energy on the wrong things whilst neglecting the right things.

However – we will get things wrong – but not to worry! We are not perfect and “see through a glass darkly”. We live by grace – not the law. God wants us to be passionate for him even though we make mistakes.

He uses us as people – even though we will mess up! So the pressure is off.

Projects

So as an example, this year -

We are starting the Thursday drop in at the hall under the Gateway Church banner. When this develops we will aim to have something for all the people in the community to come to, where we can serve them as a church – as the effective body of Christ.

As Paul has already said we must not overlook any section of the community that we can serve – and the poor and needy in particular come in all shapes and sizes. Our work is underpinned by our response to God’s love for us and we aim to share that as widely as possible. We hope that people respond to that by wanting to know more about this Jesus and the good news of the kingdom of God. However, this work has intrinsic value in itself as we are reminded to “remember the poor” all the way through the bible – whether or not they become Christians.

But we won’t be backwards in offering prayer and sharing our witness statement to anyone as appropriate. And we will be inviting people to come along to these Sunday meetings and lunch and anything else we do. The

principle is that we should always be ready for “them” to become “us” and helping that to happen whenever God opens the door in someone’s life.

Of course we will also aim to have BBQs, parties, specific events to invite people to, work parties, walks etc as before. It’s all about relationships and community and the only way to build those is to spend time together.

Progress

God’s heart is to build his church – it is his – the bride of Christ. It is his plan to demonstrate the kingdom of Heaven on earth – until all things are made new. We are part of that plan – what a privilege!

We should expect progress – it may be in unexpected ways but I really hope and pray that we will be different in a year’s time – both as a church and as individuals.

Part

We are a part of something bigger – the Christ Central group of churches (about 90) , Newfrontiers (about 1000), the churches around us here and where we live, churches across the world and the church through all the ages!

We only know in part now – we don’t have a cast iron plan or formula. Remember that Jesus said to his disciples:

AC 1:7 "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Let’s all look forward to that together – God knows where we may end up!