

## **The Parish of St Erkenwald, Barking Vicars' Report to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2019**

It was Youjin's 21 weeks scan when she was pregnant with Daniel. The doctor found a problem with Daniel's growth. He said that Daniel was too small in his weeks. After a few weeks, we had to have another scan and the doctor was concerned that the baby didn't seem to grow much. He suspected that Daniel might have some problem with his genes, and he could die at any time. So he encouraged us to come to the hospital every day to scan the baby's heart beat.

It was one of the most painful times, we experienced. Countless people had prayed for the baby inside Youjin's womb. Eventually Daniel was born normal and healthy by the grace of God. It was a miracle, and people around us called him a miracle boy.

Since having had that experience, I am very conscious about growth. As a parent of three kids, I am expecting them to grow. If they were not growing, there must be some problem with their health. I would contact the hospital or try to find a way to help my children to grow with all my best.

Church is meant to grow as we see the way that the early church grew rapidly. God is expecting that. If there is no growth, there must be some problems that prevent the growth. Early last year, I sensed that God had called this church to grow and promised that He would bring opportunities to grow. I love APCM(Annual Parochial Church Meeting) because there we find time and space to examine how much we have grown both spiritually and numerically over the the year.

This year God has brought different dimensions of growth. I would like to give thanks to God by mentioning each of them.

First, Growing Sunday School: Sunday school is growing. In particular, Footsteps' the room is too small to accommodate all the younger children at the moment. This is one of our issues that PCC has been praying for and finding a way to provide them a good and pleasant space. We have tried to help them to grow their confidence in expressing their heart through worship, offering prayers for their friends and adults. And we have seen their confidence develop during worship, especially at our family service.

Second, Growing Young people: Although some of young people have stopped coming to church the #SelfieWithGod group is growing stronger in their relationship with one another and with God. Recently we ran a Youth Alpha Course. There were 9 regular participants. They engaged with the sessions really well and learned all the fundamental truth of Christianity. I have seen personally their desire and passion to know God and live out the gospel in their lives. I am so thankful to God that they understand what it means to be a Christian. They are aware that being Christians doesn't mean

to be served but to serve God and others. As a result, many of them are already part of various volunteering ministries and actively help and support church events with their time, energy and gifts.

Third, Growing into the knowledge of God: Peter encourages Christians to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 3:18. I have experienced our congregations' genuine eager to know God deeper and wider. We had dealt with several paradoxes we could encounter in the Bible as part of Sunday teaching series. That teaching helped us to see both the reality of our struggles and the reality of the power of the gospel in life. Furthermore, during the Lent period, at least one third of the congregation participated in the Lent Course-Letters to the Church series. We have been deeply convicted and challenged by the teaching which refreshed our understanding of what it meant to be His church, the body of Christ. It has been an eye opening and inspiring time. And there are several changes that we may make individually and corporately to be a more biblical healthy church in the coming months.

Fourth, Growing into maturity: Paul said to Ephesians, 'We are not meant to remain as children... we are to grow up in every way into Christ, the head.' Looking back last three years of my time at St Erkenwald's, I have had growing sense of God's grace and maturity in our relationship with God and one another in our community. The key to maturity is not about knowledge (how much we know about the bible) nor our age (how long we have been Christians) but about humility knowing who we are and whose we are in Christ. Humility helps us to be open and honest to one another. It empowers us to build up each other as members of His body. I could hear less gossiping and less complaining and more love and more grace in the church. Praise God!

So now where we are going?

a. Identifying our gifts

The aim of our growth is not to build our own kingdom in Barking but His Kingdom in the community where we belong. Abraham was blessed by God not to make his own tribe to prosper but to be a blessing to all nations. God has brought this church His blessing for us to be blessing to our community.

We, Christians believe that each one of us has a unique gift(s) and calling(s). We are meant to use these gifts and callings to love and serve others. That is what the early church did and people around them noticed that they were disciples of Christ.

For the next few months, we are going to look at spiritual gifts in the bible. We will identify our gifts and find a way to develop them so that we can be a blessing and a light to our community. And may God's name be glorified.

b. Fun Raising

Last year we have had very successful Fun-raising which helps to raise fund for both sound system and building maintenance (particularly roof). Thank you

so much for your generous contribution through your finance, time, energy and creativity. I said it was successful not only because we have collected a good amount of funds but also it helps to restore community spirit in our local community. Well done everyone. It was great teamwork and we all enjoyed it.

Our job has not finished yet. Still we need more financial support to change our sound system and repair our roof. PCC will review our current strategy and directions and will come up with fresh focus and vision in the following months.

There are still many other things to share with you but I may need to stop here. But I want to pass my big thank you to all our volunteers who have sacrificed their time, tears, sweat, energy, prayer and finance to love God and to love others.

Recently someone said to me that we do not need a vicar – I hope he tried to make a joke. When I heard it, I felt really encouraged rather than discouraged. Because the best vicar I am picturing is this: when he or she leaves the church no one would notice his(her) absence because the church would be running as normal. No one should rely totally on the vicar, but on God by standing in His love and trusting in Him being confident in their gifts and calling given by God. That is my job to release you in your gifts and nourish you to grow in your calling. I want to see and find more of you flourishing this year as we love one another.

God is expecting you to grow and His church to grow.

With love and prayers,

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