

## **APCM 2011 - vicar's address**

I want to begin by setting the task we have just undertaken – the parish audit – in context. The major item for discussion at St Chad's over the past 12 months has been the Campaign. It is a cause for great thankfulness that, as you have heard, the PCC were able to commission the work on the tower to begin at its meeting last Monday, which means that the two major elements of the first part of the appeal, the organ and the tower, will have been completed by the end of the year. I am hugely grateful to members of the development group, and especially Adrian Richards, for the time they have given to this project, and to all those who have given generously towards it. It is the greatest challenge St Chad's has faced for a very long time, and, as was inevitable, the challenge is more than just financial. It has also challenged us as the Body of Christ here in Shrewsbury. How do we relate to each other? How do we work out disagreements? How do we care for one another in all the huge consumption of time and energy that a campaign involves? Vital questions if we are to meet the challenge of the Campaign and become a stronger and healthier church as a result. I was delighted firstly by the decision to continue with our 10% giving to charitable causes. But what the Campaign has called for above all has been team players and the capacity to work together for the common good – to make sure that difficulties and disagreements are faced up to and dealt with honestly, and that anybody who is hurt by a particular decision is properly listened to and cared for afterwards.

The burden that falls on church officers in a busy church like ours is one of the key issues that the audit is unearthing, and whether the administrative support St Chad's gives them is sufficient. The overall question is "what sort of church do we wish to be? What are our key objectives in the next five years" (or in today's jargon, what is our Mission Action Plan). Ten years ago, just before I arrived, the decision was taken to reduce the size of our parish, by putting those areas that lay beyond the Roman Road into other neighbouring parishes. Some strongly objected to the decision, because they said, it emasculated the parish of St Chad's. But I fully supported it and continue to do so, because its aim was to free us to engage more fully with the town centre. I have always taken that very seriously, regarding my ministry as being partly to you and to St Alkmund's, but also partly to the wider structures and organisations of the town. And that is a responsibility shared by the whole church, which is where the audit comes in. It was also the major reason why we changed the time of the morning service to 10am. I know this doesn't perhaps many of you, who by definition are the committed members of this church – or you wouldn't be here! You know when you go to bed on Saturday night that you are coming to church on Sunday morning – indeed it would probably suit you if we moved back to a 9am start! But I believe that while 9.30am was a good start time for a parish eucharist, 10am is a better time for a town centre eucharist, at which there will be many occasional visitors, many new faces, many tourists who have been staying in local hotels and come after a leisurely breakfast. It also suits that significant number who travel here some distance (like the organiser of our audit!) and it has made the growth of our choral tradition possible as you can see. At any rate the decision was made to try it for a year, and it will be reviewed once that year is up, at the July PCC.

What sort of church should we aim to become? My vision has always been encapsulated by our mission statement "open doors, open hearts, open minds". But my vision also has a strong visual element, which I perhaps haven't expressed strongly enough in the past. It is there in the picture we brought back from St Petersburg and which hangs next to the glass doors into church –

Rembrandt's "The prodigal son". I will return to this theme more fully at a later date, but my vision for this church is there in the Father who waits for his son's return and then runs out to greet and embrace him. It is there in the prodigal son himself who returns to his father's embrace although he knows that he is far from perfect and doesn't deserve that love. Over the next five years I would like us to take that vision and that ministry more and more seriously as the Body of Christ in this place. And in that I include myself, knowing that I am perceived as being too busy, too task driven and therefore unavailable.

One final thing. In answer to that busyness I know that many are saying "Why doesn't the diocese give him a curate?" To which I give three answers; firstly that there are far fewer curates than there used to be – 13 in the whole of this diocese this year I think – and most of those would not fit with the theological standpoint of this church; secondly that unlike most churches we are particularly blessed with retired Clergy; but most important of all, this is a church with a rich array of talented, gifted people, and a long tradition of producing Clergy and others who have given their lives to God's kingdom and his church. I would like a priority of the next five years to be the rediscovery of that tradition here – "grow your own ministry" if you like. And in financial terms we must increase the budget – which means raising more money – to pay for people like David Leeke, Marianne and David in the campaign office, Lesley Hall and Nicky.

In conclusion I am particularly grateful to the staff team, an innovation of the last 12 months, meeting weekly, and making possible the closer cooperation with our sister church, St Alkmund's. To the wardens, especially Selby who as you know is retiring. And to Geoff Cass, our excellent and conscientious treasurer, who has done so much to get us to take budgeting seriously and for whom the Campaign has been a particular challenge. Now that the PCC has commissioned the work on the tower to begin – which incidentally he supported and voted for last Tuesday – he has decided that after five years as treasurer – before which he was also churchwarden – it is time to hand on to someone else. The job description will be affected by the audit, but I would certainly like the appointment of a small financial team to support his successor.