

5 YEAR AIMS FOR THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING HOPE

As the Leadership team have been seeking the right way forward for The Church of the Living Hope, we have been aware that church life can drift on from month to month, and year to year, without any clear vision, or direction. We do need God-given vision. We do need a sense of where we are going, and for this reason we have put together some 5-year aims, which relate to the general priorities we think we should have in the next 5 years. Our hope is that the whole church will both understand, and embrace, these aims as we seek to see the church flourish and grow.

The first aim is :

1. To be fully rooted in worship, prayer and in seeking God and His guidance, so that we are consistently hearing His voice and letting Him guide us forward.

Jesus himself spoke of the importance of Hearing His Father's voice. He said in John 5 v 19 "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what He sees His Father doing." He placed prayer at the heart of his ministry, often going to lonely places to pray, and spending time in prayer before making big decisions, like choosing his 12 disciples.

In the same way, it's vitally important for us to be a prayerful church, seeking to place worship, prayer, and seeking God's wisdom and guidance, at the heart of the church's life. If we don't do that, we will be building on sand.

The second aim is :

2. To be a church in which people are enabled to grow in their discipleship, and on their wholeness journey, as followers of Jesus, and citizens of His kingdom, rooted in God's word the Bible, and using the Holy Spirit's gifts, bringing His kingdom into our community and area, as His Spirit leads us.

Helping people to grow in their discipleship and knowledge of Jesus must be central to church life, whether that growth happens through Bible-based teaching in church, through Growth Groups, Alpha Courses, or helping people to develop their own regular pattern of worship, prayer and Bible reading in their daily lives. For real dynamic spiritual growth to happen, we need both God's word and also the empowering of the Holy Spirit, and so we need to be a church that emphasises both word and Spirit in order to help people to grow in their knowledge of the Lord.

The third aim is :

3. To become a fully missional church. And we have highlighted two aspects of this. The first is being a church in which everyone is committed to living out and sharing their faith wherever they go.

The point here is that we are all called by Jesus to be His witnesses. This isn't just something for the Minister, or Leadership team. Every Christian, wherever they are, is called to share their faith, and I really believe that when a whole church takes hold of this calling, it can invigorate the life of the church and lead to a steady stream of people coming to faith in Jesus. So what a great aim this is.

The other aspect of this third aim is becoming a church in which our worship and church life is both relevant and accessible to people who are new to church. We want to ensure that new people are welcomed and that our worship is easy for them to come into, that we are not

using complicated religious jargon, or acting in a way that is weird, but speaking in a way that they can understand. Our church life must be accessible to the newcomer, whilst also enabling more experienced Christians to grow in faith.

The fourth aim is to do with “Growing younger”.

4. It is “To seek to grow younger, so that the Church of the Living Hope has a good number of people of all ages, and is also encouraging and raising up younger leaders.”

In saying this, let me be clear first of all that we do really appreciate and value our older members, with the wisdom and experience they bring and we are all equally important whatever our age, or background. That is fundamental and we do want more older people to be part of the life of the church too.

However, we have set an aim of growing younger, because at the moment younger people are underrepresented in our congregation, and especially in our church leadership, and we firmly believe that the gospel is for people of all ages and generations.

We are already trying to encourage children and families, especially through the morning service, and events like the Fun Day, and we will be intentionally seeking to draw in more younger people. We will also be looking to bring some of them into church leadership, when appropriate, and to involve them in church services and church life in other ways. This must be a high priority if the church is to grow and move forward.

The fifth and final aim for the next 5 years is :

5. “To identify, and to either have bought, or to be looking to buy, our own church building.”

In saying this, we want to make clear that we don't think we should rush into this. We do think the community centre is a really good venue for us at the moment. We are very grateful for the help and support of the trustees here, and it may well be that we will still be here in a few years' time.

However, as the church grows, and when the right building becomes available, we do believe that it will be right in time to have our own church building, and this is something that should be in our minds as we look to the future. We don't need to rush, as I say, but it's something we need to keep in our minds.

So those are our 5-year aims, but what are the aims for?

Well, they are there to guide us in our church life, in our planning, and in our decision-making, as we look to the future. As we think about activities, and the way we do things, we will be asking “Do these things fit into our aims? Are they linked to prayer and discipleship? Do they fit in with us being a missional church and being a church that is seeking to grow younger?”

And I want to add at this point that if anyone has any thoughts or ideas about things that would help us move forward with fulfilling any of these aims (either now or at a later stage), please do feel free to share them with any of the members of the Leadership Team.

We hope that these 5 Aims will be embraced by the whole church and become an important part of our thinking and development in the months and years ahead.