

Sunday Focus Meeting – 13th January 2013 – Discipleship

The meeting was chaired by Rev. Glyn Oliver and 46 people were present.

The meeting opened with prayer.

Diary

Glyn gave a brief review of all the church events during the autumn and over the Christmas period.

Future events as follows;

27th Jan – Street Pastors Burns Night Fund Raising event at Civic Hall. Margaret reported that since the previous Focus Meeting the financial situation for Street Pastors had improved greatly and is a real answer to prayer. They now have £6000 in hand which will cover running costs through to the end of March.

27th Feb – Mike Pilavachi at Shush. About 80 tickets are still available to purchase for this event.

24th March – Palm Sunday March

29th March – Good Friday 'Cross in the Square'. This has now been taken up as a Church Partnership event which helps with the cost of financing the event but open to changing the dynamics. Glyn is concerned to maintain the impact of the presentation. Possibly music from a Gospel choir this Easter. Sam is responsible for the drama.

12th May – Garth Hewitt at Shush

19th May – next Sunday Focus Meeting

The Elders are also looking at opportunities for the Fellowship to meet fairly regularly on Sunday evenings.

Finance – this report was presented by Brian Mitchell

Brian was pleased to inform the Fellowship that the financial situation had improved and 2012 finished in a much better position than anticipated. This was due to a number of new Standing Orders being set up and Gift Aid being available from some of them. We now have a much healthier £9605 as our reserve.

The Fellowship is looking at an income of £44,275 for 2013 but because we are growing in numbers and wish to spend more on mission, outreach, children and youth work during 2013, it is anticipated that our expenditure could be £52,479. This would again deplete our reserves but the general situation would be more hopeful since members have already promised increase in giving.

Two questions were asked on finance;

Q. What is the position regarding Gift Aid on donations once someone is retired?

A. Brian confirmed that if tax is still being paid on pension income then it is still possible to Gift Aid but care has to be taken that the amount received back in Gift Aid by the Fellowship is covered by the level of tax deducted from that individual.

Q. Has the projected income been adjusted due to the increase in giving?

A. The projected income has been taken to £48,000 so this would mean a possible shortfall of 4k between projected income and projected expenditure for 2013.

A time of worship was led by Carrie White followed by offering and prayer.

Wantage Food Bank – report given by Audrey Dutton

Helen Margetts who organises the food bank asked Audrey to pass on a big thank you to everyone who had contributed to the food bank making it such a helpful resource to the community. The collecting trolleys at both Sainsbury's and Waitrose had been very effective prior to the Christmas period. Sixty- six Christmas parcels were distributed, double that of last year.

October – 11 parcels distributed

November - 17 parcels distributed

December – 13 parcels distributed

The food bank is currently well stocked and will return to its usual collection points for now.

However, Sainsbury's is happy to make an in-store collection trolley available again if stocks dip during the year.

Report from Ruth Henderson – Metro Ministries

Since Ruthie was over from New York for an extended Christmas break, Glyn asked her to let the Fellowship know about her work with Metro Ministries. Ruth began by giving a brief overview of why she is working with Metro Ministries. She studied for a degree in broadcasting at university and then went into church/youth work after that. Ultimately she wanted a job which combined her broadcasting skills with her desire for young people's work. Metro Ministries provided that combination and she serves with them as their Media Director but also has the opportunity 2 days a week to work on outreach with mothers and children. She works in a fairly dangerous part of New York where there is a lot of poverty, poor quality accommodation and the children tend to be disregarded or meet with abuse. Ruthie showed a short film clip of Metro Ministries Christmas Appeal which highlighted this situation. She thanked the Fellowship and individuals for the monetary gifts she had received for her work. She explained that up to 50 children travelled on her bus to Sunday School every week and she would use the money to purchase Bibles for each one. In that way they could use the travelling time for Bible study.

She shared Isaiah 41 v 10 with the meeting as a verse which had been given to her by the Lord when she was struggling with a severe back problem shortly after she had gone out to work in New York. The verse was a great encouragement to her at that time. Although none of us know what the future year might bring, and there may be difficult or desperate times ahead, we can know that God is with us and will strengthen us.

Discipleship

Glyn asked the meeting what they considered discipleship to be and if anyone wanted to share aspects of their own daily discipleship since all of us can embrace discipleship exactly where God has

placed us. Discipleship is not always easy, we can find ourselves in bewildering circumstances and being a disciple doesn't mean life is comfortable. Mention was made of Jo Tomlinson who has found herself being accused of abducting her children when she removed them from New Zealand to be free from an abusive life with her husband. Brian asked us to continue to pray for her situation. David Henderson gave a personal account of his discipleship in the world of business and Sue Jenkins spoke about organising Messy Church in Uffington to serve the community and spread the gospel.

We watched a Rob Bell DVD on the topic of discipleship. Glyn explained that although he didn't agree with all of Rob Bell's thinking on aspects of theology, this DVD was very insightful. Rob Bell talks about the passage from the gospels when Jesus walks on the water towards the disciples in the midst of a storm. Peter gets out of the boat to walk to Jesus but then starts to sink. Rob Bell asks the question, what is Peter thinking when he sees Jesus on the water and why does he decide to walk on the sea himself? Rob Bell explained the Jewish background to boys becoming disciples of a particular rabbi. By the age of 10 most Jewish boys would have memorised the Torah, the first five books in the Bible. The clever ones would carry on learning and memorise the rest of the Hebrew Scripture. By age 15, the best would go on to become a rabbi's disciple. They would want to learn what their rabbi does as well as what he knows. They would take on the rabbi's 'yoke'. The boy would be questioned by the rabbi as to his suitability to become his disciple and if he was acceptable then he would have to leave home and family to join the rabbi. The phrase used to describe this was 'May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi' so complete was the learning experience of the disciple. Most rabbis would start their teaching at the age of 30 just as Jesus commenced his ministry at that age and called Peter and Andrew, James and John and others to follow him. Except that these men were not the cleverest, they had not been good enough to be taken on by a rabbi at the age of 15 and yet Jesus believed in them and wanted them as his disciples. So Peter wanted to walk on the water like Jesus, his rabbi. The problem is that Peter sinks because he loses faith in himself, not in Jesus. Jesus certainly believed in him. Equally God believes in us! Jesus has faith that we can follow Him, be his disciples and do His work here on earth.

Glyn asked the question, 'How in 2013 can we make disciples in Jesus?' Brian commented that being a disciple isn't easy but they had recently attended a funeral of a non-believer and was saddened by the atmosphere of hopelessness. He felt he missed the opportunity to share his faith and hadn't shared much in 2012 at all.

As a fellowship, we would look at the topic of discipleship in Home Groups once the current topic on prayer was completed.

Sarah Ellis added that so many in our town don't know God and although we may find it difficult, we need to move away from our comfort zones and put ourselves out in discipleship in our communities.

Carrie led the meeting in a final song and Glyn then closed with a prayer encouraging/emphasising discipleship and witnessing during 2013.