

Annual Vestry Meeting
Grace Church in Scarborough

10 February 2013
Rev David Howells

Following this service we begin our Annual Vestry Meeting.

Firstly we will have an agenda with a timeline attached. This will not be legalistically enforced but should keep us on track so that we don't lose ourselves in small details, and miss the bigger and more necessary items. An agenda also lets everyone know what is going to happen and when. I like knowing what is going on, and I assume that everyone else should be accorded that courtesy.

Secondly the AVM is our AGM. Any public organization worth its salt uses this time to review the goals set at the previous year's meeting, and then set goals for the next year as it unfolds.

How do we do this?

To begin with this year we have a lot more to report back on.

We have made it through our first year and we have done more than survive, we have, I think, thrived! The community of Grace Church is one solid community, not "four tribes" as the old *Survivor* show would say.

We have reached far beyond most Anglican churches in our style of worship. The Contemporary Service has been embraced, as you can see if you just count the numbers and listen to the singing. We tried simplifying the 10.30 Communion with fewer readings, but a clear call came to reverse this trend. So we have been back with 3 to 4 Biblical passages each Sunday, which enables us to increase the music too! I heard a clear call that we are in no rush to be done in 60 minutes, so I can relax. But I cannot relax too much since I know that we need to keep trying changes out. Holding onto the status quo is leading to decline all through our church. Your decision to risk amalgamation was decision to move forward into the unknown in many ways. So, be warned! I will not let you slip comfortably backwards.

By contrast the 8.30 liturgy is doing something very different. Here we are intentionally holding an ancient and unchanging pattern of worship which roots us in our historical origins. Starting this month we will begin a Morning Prayer service in place of the Eucharist each 3rd Sunday. So in our two Sunday worships we are spreading our wings ever wider. Deep roots and fresh shoots.

The readings for the Transfiguration we heard today are a good template for who we are as a church in motion. The disciples saw a vision of Jesus, glowing and with Moses and Elijah. They saw him as fully equal to the representatives of the Law and the Prophets, conferring like old friends. But what they were talking about was not the good old days, but the change that lay ahead: Death and Resurrection! Even in this moment of a shift from what we would call Old Testament to New Testament

Peter tried to catch it, to make it hold still, to make it always caught in the moment like a photograph. He wanted to build something permanent to keep it all still and safe in a changing world. But what this story teaches is that the most intimate moments of love, of truth, of God are beyond being “trapped” and are to be cherished and recalled.

You need to tell and retell the stories of those moments when your spiritual life was most on fire. But you also need to keep going forwards, for God is always waiting for you in the future, and is never found by trying to go backwards.

So Grace Church is going, this Summer, forwards into a new building, forwards into a new ministry, into new ways of worship, new relationships with neighbours, new risks with Jesus and new places to seek his face.

And we do that by remembering who are, who we have been, where we come from, and when we have known and touched God. To reach new hearts we will tell old stories.

Peter never got to build the shelters, but he did get to tell the stories.

So we are at the hinge of the past and the future. AVM is about to happen.

We have Wardens and a Parish Council appointed by Bishop Patrick, and affirmed by legislation in Synod Council, to last till September. So we will not be electing today. I am asking that we hold together until we are in the new building and even through our first Christmas there until we elect a whole set of officers at this time next year. The wardens are OK with this and I will be asking the Council if they will continue. Synod Delegates similarly will remain unchanged. We need the stability and the team work that we have built up to get through this next steps forward. Not just a new building, but a whole new staffing development is coming. The Diocese has smiled upon us!

So following the service, and a chance to find a cuppa and a snack, we enter the Annual Vestry Meeting. That we are going there straight from worship matters. AVMS are sacred times. Jesus said that whenever two or three gather in his name he will be there, in the midst of them. Jesus also said that we, who are disciples of his, will know that he is with us, even to the end of the age. This is both weighty and light. Weighty in that we have to edit our speech, knowing that each of us speaks before the Lord today. Light in that we will be trusting that it will not be just up to us to come up with wisdom, but that the Holy Spirit of God is working through us, guiding us in thought and word.