

Warden's Report

Last weekend, I was part of the group from CCK that spent time together in the Cederberg. During the course of many chats trudging up the mountain, I realised that even people who have been coming to Christ Church for many years do not necessarily know who or what pastorate is. So I want to start by briefly explaining some of this.

We are a group of leaders whose task is to give oversight to the life and witness of Christ Church. This means working closely with Rob (who is accountable to us), being involved in decision-making and putting proposals to the Church body. On pastorate, there are three elected Wardens (me, Barry Jessop and Dave Curry) other elected congregational members (Cheryl Anderson, Nikki Pinder and Ruan de Wet), and selected staff members (John McPetrie, Barbara Richardson and Keenan Farquhar). Wardens and Pastorate members are elected for a three-year term – you may remember that last year Nikki and Ruan's names were put to this meeting for election to pastorate. A second term can be served, but no more than that. Unusually, this year, we have no pastorate members finishing their terms of office. We do have capacity for a bigger pastorate, but have decided not to make any changes until Guy Axelson comes next year. (There is one exception to this, which I will talk about later)

Our pattern has been to meet twice a month for an hour and a half to two hours on a Thursday morning at 7am. One meeting is devoted mostly to business, and one to reflecting on Scripture and prayer. Lockdown has meant that we haven't had to battle our way through the traffic as we have met only on zoom since March - and I suspect that more than one of us in the middle of winter was wearing cunningly disguised pyjamas. In addition to this meeting, the three Wardens meet with Rob at least one early morning a month to provide him with support, and a forum to discuss additional issues.

Over the past few months, Rob has been leading us through a study on Philippians. The words of Phil 1: 9 – 11 have been very present in my mind as I have prepared this report: *⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.*

As a leadership team, we want to serve out of a place of love, and for our discussions and decisions to be made out of a place of “knowledge and depth of insight” so that we may “discern what is best”. This is not a straightforward task! We have reached for this “knowledge and depth of insight” as we have we have prayed and read together, and as we have listened, discussed, argued and struggled. Each of us, according to our temperament, age, gender, career and life experience have contributed particular knowledge, particular insight. Despite the differences between us, we are grateful that God has forged us into a cohesive team.

One of the big issues which has been highlighted across the world this year has been the inequality and violence – both psychological and physical – which continue to affect people of colour in the long shadow of colonialism and apartheid. As a pastorate, we have begun to grapple with this through reading and discussion with each other and others within our community. We have realised that our “depth of insight” will remain shallow and limited without greater diversity in the team. A high priority early next year will be to co-opt a person of colour on to our team. We are delighted that someone whom we have approached many times is at last available – we will keep you informed of further developments in this regard. In addition, we are aware of the need for us as a leadership team to take this beyond just theoretical knowledge, but to examine our own hearts and lives in order to gain the “depth of insight”. To this end, we will be having a facilitated morning early next year, to reflect on how race and cultural issues play out in our own lives and in the life of the church.

As Rob mentioned earlier, a significant task of the pastorate this year was process of seeking Rob’s successor. The Search Team was constituted in April, consisting of the 6 pastorate members, and 3 additional members elected by the church – Andre Frieslaar, Mike Kane and Keenan Farquhar. We met every week, alternating between business meetings, and prayer and reflection times. Often processes like this can be very fraught, and we are extremely grateful for the leadership of the Parish Rector, Duncan McLea, the deep bonds that formed between us, and the profound sense of God’s presence with us as we negotiated putting together an advertisement, receiving applications, and interviewing referees and the candidates. (Mike Kane has written an article reflecting on this which will be available soon on the website). The decision to appoint Guy Axelson was the conclusion of an exacting and challenging process. We are very excited at the prospect of Guy, MJ and their four children joining us in July next year.

As we go into 2021, there are many challenges which we are acutely aware of: saying goodbye to Rob, managing an interregnum of 3 months, and supporting Guy as he settles in and faces the formidable task of leading Christ Church. Of course, there are challenges we are unaware of – and who knows how Covid will continue to affect our lives? There are big questions to grapple with: what does it mean to be a church that is the “hope of the world” (Bill Hybels), that will draw in young people and families, that will be a safe and welcoming place that accommodates difference; that will remain true to the Gospel of Christ; and that will be a compelling witness to all those who seek meaning and relationship with God?

One of the things that we have appreciated about Rob is his willingness to engage with questions like these, and many others. He has had some very tough issues to deal with in his time with us, and there have been periods of deep pain for him. But in all of this, we have known him to be a leader and a man who is steadfast, humble, trustworthy and kind. On behalf of the pastorate, Rob, I would like to thank you for your dedication, hard work and commitment to your calling. We pray for strength and energy for you and Sue as you finish the last stretch, and for great joy and fulfilment for you both as you follow God’s leading.