

A summary of a sermon preached by our Team Rector about our campaign: Embrace the Future.

The Church in Portishead stands at a crossroads and by what happens over the next few weeks the future direction of our parish will be decided. We need to make some critical decisions about our church buildings and how we respond will shape the future for generations to come.

There are siren voices that tell we do not need church buildings, that the building we have are of the wrong type or in the wrong place or that we have too many. To me this seems like asking for directions and being told "Oh I would not start from here". But the reality is we have the historical legacy we have been given, we are where we are.

Others tell me that it is wrong to spend large sums of money on church buildings and that such money should go to more deserving causes. I would love not to have to spend money on our buildings but as every home owner knows you have from time to time to spend money on your house. The church is no different even if it is on a larger scale. But also why does it have to be either/or? Why cannot it be both/and. My experience is that many parishes that have raised even larger sums than we face are often those parishes paying the largest parish share and giving the most in outward giving. Generosity breeds generosity. Parishes that have learnt the meaning of sacrificial giving carry on giving sacrificially.

We need to stop seeing our buildings as problems and see them as opportunities. Just by their sheer presence in the town they speak of the presence of God. They speak of a community in touch with God, they act as a reminder that a healthy community needs the presence of God. In what is rapidly becoming a new town they speak of our history and our heritage. For the health of the community it is important that we do not forget our heritage, the story of where we have come from – that helps us understand who we are. And in this rapidly expanding town our churches provide much needed places where the community can gather. Our town has a significant shortage of larger venues where we can come together.

Above all our churches are springboards for mission and ministry. Over 12,000 different people used our churches last year – that is nearly half the population of the town. And many of those that came, came precisely because we are who we are, with the building that we have. Our buildings are part of what draw people to us and provide a recognisable base from which we can go out to service the community. Without our buildings our witness and mission is weakened.

Past generations have passed on to us a wonderful legacy. They often had to scrimp and save to maintain these buildings yet they did it. They also developed and changed the buildings to make them more fit for purpose. Now it has fallen to our generation to pick up

the challenge, to ensure the buildings are fit for purpose in the 21st century and to pass on to future generations our buildings in good condition.

This does of course present a large challenge. We have done our very best to ensure there is no unnecessary expenditure and have sought every way to limit our plans to the essentials. Nevertheless to achieve our target will take deep and sacrificial giving. Much will depend on how passionate we are about our church life and how determined we are to embrace the future.

One church in our deanery, in a similar town and with a similar size congregation held a gift day and raise £0.75 million. They believed in what their church was doing and were determined to make it happen. How determined are we?

When faced with a major challenge we can either face the future with imagination and fear or imagination and love. If we think the challenge is beyond us, is too much, fear takes over and hope deserts us. When we face the future with imagination and love many things become possible. Together, with God, we can do great things together. Together with God we can achieve things which alone might indeed seem impossible.

I do not believe I was appointed as your Team rector to watch over the demise of Portishead Church of England, to watch it shrink or retreat. I believe I was appointed to help Portishead Church of England grow and to find a new identity in the growing town. I believe both this town and our nation need the church and without the church at the heart of the community, of our nation and our town then I do indeed fear for the future. Our town needs a strong, vibrant church community and part of that will be buildings well maintained and fit for purpose in the 21st century.

So I ask you to prayerfully read the Embrace the Future and to consider how you can respond. Can you dig deep and respond sacrificially? How passionate are you about the future of Portishead Church of England. We stand at the crossroads – dare we take the risk of embracing the future?