

## Pioneer Leaders Report – Feast 2018

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releasing communities of followers in the mission of Jesus

The Feast is our birthday celebration. It is our opportunity to look back with thanks at where God has brought us, look forward to the future and re-commit ourselves to journeying together as one church.

This is our 7th Birthday! I know some of you have been part of a church in this area for far longer than 7 years. Very occasionally I get a piece of information sent to the Vicar of St Mary's High Harrogate (the church of England has a long memory), I've loved hearing from some of you, and from some of our neighbours, about vicars from the past who have held my current house. I value the heritage we have grown from, and those of you who have travelled through the last 10 years of change. But we do need to remind ourselves about the profundity of that change. We are a 7 year old church. A Fresh Expression journeying towards maturity.

Much of that journey has been so full of joy. We as a family have so many happy memories of our first few years here as I was Curate. Of your welcome and love to us, of being part of Communities here in Vintage and Ohana, of starting and leading with you some really fun initiatives – KKTT, Blaze, our first couple of Kairos Alphas. Of seeing new Christians baptized and confirmed. We've seen Step Up grow and develop alongside a wider network, and sharing what we have learnt with others began to take off. Looking back over my 5 years journey with you there is so much to give thanks for!

And of course some harder times. Sickness, difficulty, pruning. Losing friends from our family. The last two years especially have had real moments of difficulty and struggle. Even in these times though I believe we have seen God's faithfulness and restoration at work. He has protected and led us; even in the really tough times we have shared moments of joy and fun together. I have seen in you, again and again, goodness being revealed as you have been under pressure.

It was a real joy to be appointed Pioneer Minister in April, but as I joined you I found a church humbler and smaller than I had left. Perhaps not as small as we think. One of the first things I did was take an audit of our MSCs and found we had 74 adults regularly connecting with Kairos through our communities plus 34 children and young people. This does not take into account those of us who regularly worship with us but were not at that time in an MSC. We had experienced pruning, but perhaps not as severe as the more pessimistic among us believed.

It felt like pruning nonetheless, and so we have responded by doing what you always do in times when God cuts off growth. By resting and coming back to him. Over the summer we suspended MSC activity, increased our Central Gatherings and introduced more prayer times together. I have enjoyed watching you relax and smile more as we've done this.

As we approach the end of the year it is time to shift back into a more activist mode. We are a church with a calling! I believe we have a distinct part in God's great plan to redeem and renew everything through his son Jesus. A purpose shaped by our identity and story.

As I've looked into our past and listened to God about our future I've become more and more convinced that we are a people called to go. We are not to be content to gather in one place, to draw people to ourselves in buildings but to look for people and places across Harrogate that we can join in with. As we go we focus on four key activities.

**Love God.** We are called to a life shaped around relationship with the God who has somehow found us, and led us to realize we are deeply and unconditionally loved. We have for many years talked about being a church concerned with discipleship. To be a disciple is simply to respond to God's love with love, and to spend a life time learning how to keep loving God and becoming more like him. Jesus calls his disciples friends, just after he has washed their feet. Elsewhere he says that all who believe in him are as close as family. This is our first call, to live whole lives of worship centered on Loving the God who loves us.

**Build Community.** We cannot speak of loving God without very quickly turning our thoughts to loving neighbours. Jesus puts these two impulses together into what he describes as the greatest commandment. We live in an increasingly isolated world and we find ourselves in a town where loneliness and isolation are regularly described as the biggest social problems. If we stop and look around us we will notice isolation, anxiety and disconnection. We have powerful tools in our hands! How can we best love one another and those around us by building community? The relationships we develop: with each other, with our neighbours, colleagues, friends and with folk that neither you or I have yet met are incredibly valuable to God. We are a church of relationships and our work to connect people, to listen to their stories, to make space for them and invite them into our communities is perhaps one of our most valuable acts of worship. To make connections, develop friendships, build community.

I want to say here that I believe these two callings, to love God and build community are our most important responses to God. They are the vertical and horizontal axis of our lives. If we do these well all sorts of good things will follow. In particular I believe we will see God doing two things.

**Make disciples.** God is calling others to him, He is at work among those around us and His Spirit is hovering over all of our relationships. As we build community, make connections, form friendships and invite others to share our lives they will see and hear real evidence of Jesus' presence in and love for the world. I can already think of many of you and the discipleship relationships that are formed around you. People are seeing your life, they are intrigued and they are wanting the relationship that you have. As we are open about our love for God and welcoming in the way we build community we will see disciples made.

**Change lives.** Disciples are simply followers of Jesus. They are the people, remember, that Jesus calls friends. They learn from us, and we learn from each other, how to love the God who loves them more. They, and we, change. We find ourselves more free, better able to hear what God says, released into surprising new ways of being, forming new kinds of families, projects and businesses. We start to live spectacularly ordinary lives making a big impact, for good, on people around us.

This is, I believe, what we are called to pursue as we go: lives that love God and orient ourselves around responding to what He says. Lives that build community through forming and deepening relationships with others. Lives that are worth imitating and see others coming to better know Jesus. Lives that change lives and have a big impact.

We pursue this way as individuals, we make it the point of our gatherings, whether you are a 9am person or come to the Central Gathering and we particularly do this through Kairos Communities. Little groups of people of all sorts of shape and size committed to loving God and building community around them. We choose these kinds of communities because we won't be able to live the joyful, loving, beautiful lives God has for us on our own, but also because we're unlikely to get there simply by gathering in large numbers on a Sunday. 3 times in the history of St Mary's and All Saints profound building problems have forced the church to leave a building and seek a new place or way. Have we got the message yet? We're not simply called to gather, we're called to go. To take ourselves to where people already are and to build community alongside them.

I believe I am simply rearticulating here a way of being church that God has led Kairos to over many years. To be a church that gathers here and all around our town in community centres, coffee shops, pubs, schools, businesses, homes, and anywhere people are, and that works together with God in those places to better love him and hold community. This is the adventurous journey we are called to.

At this point on that journey we face a few challenges.

### **Regain movement**

We have come to close to a standstill. It was necessary to rest together and remember we loved God and liked each other. Now is time to let that love draw us on to pick up tools and rebuild communities.

Over this term we will see the planning and launch of Kairos Communities, some new incarnations of earlier MSCs and some brand new. We will see some innovative and different communities forming, some as small as a couple of households, others much bigger. As Basecamp continues we will discern together which communities are to be launched first. We will also be picking up some of the tools that have helped us build community in the past, and learning some new ones. No one has to be part of any of these, there is no pressure to do anything. But these will be where the most energy, life and fun will be.

### **Find sustainability**

Communities will also be where some of the greatest challenges lie. We will not build community or make disciples unopposed. If we are to continue to develop this work we will need to find simple practices and rhythms that enable us to love God and one another well through tough times. God invites us to find a spirituality that sustains.

We are a small church with a big mission! We must remember that and not burn out. Yes, between us we'll need to work out how to make the coffee, run the kids ministry, lead the worship, establish the community, count the pennies, preach the sermons and reach our friends. But that doesn't mean all of us have to do all of the above, actually it doesn't mean any of us have to do any of it. This is important to hear, there is so much opportunity, so much God offers us to get involved in, but it's gift. You don't have to do everything, you don't in fact have to do anything. Our only responsibility is to see the need, the gaps and the opportunities and respond to what we think God is saying about that. Yes we're reliant on time and contributions, but only do what you feel He is asking you recognizing that God equips where he calls. Let's work, serve, and love together in a sustainable way.

We will also need to find a financial model that sustains our mission. Do you feel like Kairos people keep telling you that we are short of money? That is not because we keep overspending but because in our infancy we relied heavily on gifts from elsewhere in the diocese, mainly to pay for a pioneer leader. As we grow up we have committed to paying for our own mission. To do that we are trying to raise our income by at least £24000 over the next 4 years. Most of our income comes from giving. So we keep asking; what is God saying to you about giving to Kairos? This year I would like each one of you to consider again what you give to the church and what God is saying about that. My personal practice is that a tithe of 10% to my local church forms the foundation of a life of generosity. I can say much more about this principle and again there is no pressure, just an invitation to listen to God about your giving as a household and make a response.

### **Move to multiplication**

We are called to give this way of living away. We are not going to be a church that grows large in one place (remember all those abandoned buildings) but to keep going and growing and going. This is multiplication. It's the kind of life Jesus says that every Christian who hears God's word and puts it in to practice gets to live. We are challenged to find ways to multiply the gospel, and Kairos, in all sorts of places.

A first step of that will be to multiply some kind of worship expression into Fairfax alongside the great work that Links and Lazy Sunday have been doing. I also want to see a larger expression of community here at Westcliffe alongside the worship life of our gatherings. These two steps are just a start. The route we are walking will keep leading us to multiplication.

We celebrate 7 years of Kairos today. Over those 7 years there has been so much evidence of God's faithfulness as he has worked through our funny little church. As we start our 8th year there is so much potential for more. God, who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, is with us. Will you join us in seeing what God will do?

It is a joy to be on this journey with you.

*Ben*