



Christ Church Newland

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13: 34-35)

No-one would deny that the last year has brought significant challenges for everyone. While we trust in God who controls all things and know that the Lord works everything for the good of those who love Him, the COVID pandemic has caused disruption, isolation and stress for many.

The pandemic made the establishment of Christ Church Newland more complicated than it might otherwise have been, but at the same time we have seen so many examples of God’s grace to us. Amazing things have been achieved in keeping us going as a church throughout the various stages of lockdown. People have been creative and have worked hard to help us stay involved, and God has blessed us.

Many of us have connections to small groups such as Home Groups, Tuesday Group, Student Group, International Group and others, which have served us well in lockdown. These groups are ideally suited to focus on the needs of individual members and have already been the source of much support as we, following our Lord’s command, have loved one another.

Nevertheless, we know that the last year has made some of us feel detached, uninvolved, isolated or lonely. So, we need to look at how we might encourage any who do not feel as connected as they would like to be, and to reach out to others who are not very involved in our groups. Our Small Groups are well placed to demonstrate our care and offer a first point of contact with the wider church family, with supportive friends in difficult times.

As Christians, we are all part of the family of Christ’s church and, as such, we walk together and share in each other’s lives, caring, supporting, encouraging and building each other up to do the work God has set before us. These considerations have been the starting point behind the establishment of a ‘Shared Life Ministry’ within Christ Church Newland, which Beverley Wing has agreed to co-ordinate.

In the summer term, we will be thinking in more depth about what it means to love one another. In our Home Groups, we will be looking at a book by Ed Welch, “Side by Side”. Subtitled “Walking with others in wisdom and love”, it identifies the skills we need to support one another in our Christian life, and it starts from the recognition that, within the church, we should all both give and receive help from each other. These books will be available from your Home Group leader from the 4th April. A member of the congregation has kindly donated the money to cover the cost of the books. If you would like to make a donation please put £10 in an envelope marked ‘Family Fund’ and place it in the collection box.

We will be considering how God created his church to be a family, joined together in Christ, and how, by binding us together in love and service to each other, we can grow as individuals and as a church. We will share ideas about how we might support each other spiritually, emotionally and in practical ways.

Out of these Bible-based considerations we aim to ensure that we continue to do as much as we can to support everyone in ways that they want and are comfortable with. That means a variety of approaches and relationships so that together we can make this an integral part of the life and growth of all members of the congregation – whether longstanding or new, Christians or those still searching. In this context, we are planning to send out a church-wide questionnaire after Easter that should tell us more about the sort of support individuals would welcome – or indeed need – as well as the skills and talents we could contribute to support each other.

As Paul notes in 1 Cor 12, God has given to each of us varying gifts, including friendship-building, empathy, generosity and concern for others' needs, as well as a shared faith and love for one another, so we can all be part of this continuing service to God and one another. Caring for one another is a privilege. It is also our Lord's command ("Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2)) so it is right that we should always be looking at how we can develop the way we support each other. As our opening quotation from John 13 reminds us, it also serves as a witness to the love of Christ to the world around us.

As a first step in developing our support for each other, we are focusing on our small groups. These groups are already adept at caring and do so in lots of different ways. During lockdown, many have been very creative in this. Small groups are now each being invited to designate one of their members willing to act as a facilitator to support the Shared Life Ministry, so we can get together and pool our ideas.

Our prayer for Christ Church Newland echoes Paul's prayer for the Ephesians that:
"... we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:15b-16)

Blessings in Christ
Scott McKay and Beverley Wing
24 March 2021