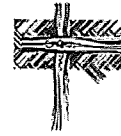




St James' Church

The Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt



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3 September, 2016

Dear parishioners

On Sunday 7 August, our Vicar Peter Benge announced Vestry's decision to institute a combined family service at St James's, taking place at 10.30am. We want to set out more comprehensively our reasons for announcing a new family service and to let you know that we have also agreed to vary our earlier decision in two respects.

Reasons for the decision to have a new family service

Our reasons for the decision to amalgamate the current 9 and 10.30am services can be set out under the following headings:

The good news

In 2012 our parish review identified ministry to youth and families as top priority for the parish. We have subsequently been given \$27,000 per annum for at least 2 years by a very generous parishioner to employ youth leaders. It is exceedingly difficult to find quality staff on a part-time basis but we succeeded in doing so at the start of this year. Chris Casey and Shannan King have been making an outstanding contribution to our youth and to connecting with young people outside the church. We want to make the most of their gifts and their presence in the parish.

The bad news

In the 6 years from 2010 to 2015, attendance numbers for St James's regular Sunday morning services declined by 19 percent overall. Attendance at the 8am service was relatively stable over this period. Attendance at the 9am service declined by 28%. Attendance at the 10.30am service declined by 20%. Declining attendance is not unique to our parish, but is in keeping with the general trend of declining attendance in our diocese and throughout the country. However, our parish's decline in this period was more pronounced than general diocesan decline. This is not to say that the worship being offered at the 9am and 10.30am services was poor. A lot of it was done well and to the satisfaction of those attending. Nevertheless, we were not fully replacing with new people those who left our services for age reasons, because of transfer to other places, or for other reasons. Despite a number of strong friendship links in the various services and despite friendliness to visitors, attendance at St James's has been declining markedly. Along with this decline in attendance there is a decline in resourcing – both in money and in volunteers to undertake various tasks. This makes it harder to sustain quality ministry. We need a change in these trends.

The problem

The service to which most people come is the 10.30am service. This service has the most youth attending and accordingly the youth leaders attend this service. However, this is a traditional service and so while youth attend and participate by doing various duties, they are not noticeably engaged by this service. We want our youth not only to attend and participate in our worship but to connect with the Christian faith and to become life-long disciples of Christ (and life-long Anglicans too, we

hope). For this to happen, they need to be able to connect more with the form of worship being offered, and that means that there needs to be more in this service that reflects contemporary culture.

Adults and families who meet at 9am are not getting to know our youth leaders, who are gifted in connecting with youth and who are positive influencers in young people's lives. The young people at the 9am service are also not meeting other young leaders and role models who worship at 10.30am.

There appears not to be much energy in any of the congregations for inviting new people to church. That might be because in fact we are not inspired by the services as they are, but are continuing to follow a vision for worship that is no longer very vital.

While we have a friendly congregation, until very recently there has not been a lot of hospitality and inclusion for newcomers.

Relatively few people who attend our services as newcomers continue to come.

If we continue the current decline in attendance, the people resources and financial resources of the church will inevitably reach a critical stage in the medium term.

Vestry's plan

We have decided to have a combined family service at St James' Church on a Sunday morning because

- we need to make our mid-late morning service more contemporary in order to have a chance of increasing the number of young people and families attending our worship;
- there is experience among our worshippers at 9am in offering a more contemporary service;
- the choir is valued by many and has its own attractional quality, so it should be retained;
- the band/contemporary music is valued by many and has its own attractional quality, so it should be retained;
- it seems helpful to expose all of our children and young people to the positive influence of our paid and volunteer youth leaders;
- during the service there will be a children's programme available weekly plus a fortnightly programme for young people in school years 7-10.
- in our view a service with a new vision for discipleship, mission, inclusion of younger people and hospitality is much more likely than the status quo to build church attendance (although we accept that there are no guarantees of this);
- a new service is a marker of a new vision, and allows greater flexibility to experiment;
- we want to grow as a family, in discipleship and in mission, in keeping with Bishop Justin's vision and our evident need. Pooling our resources seems to us the best way of doing this.

Risks

The following have been identified as risks in this plan (there will be more as well, no doubt):

- that parishioners will prefer to continue with what they find comfortable rather than engaging in a new vision – despite the fact that having no new vision is a recipe for continued decline. This is why it was decided that an announcement by Vestry rather than a consultation was the better way of introducing this new plan, to make it clear that a decision for change had been made and so that consultation could relate primarily to the nature of the new service and how people could enable it to be a success.

- that the coming together of the 9am and the 10.30am services will be too difficult or disappointing for some people and cause them to get discouraged, seek to worship elsewhere, or stop worshipping;
- that the new service will become a battle-ground where different people or factions will seek to get their own way, rather than being genuinely open to God's Spirit and what God might want to do in this new space.

There is obviously plenty within these comments and underneath them that will be the subject for further discussion, but in order to limit the size of this letter, we will conclude the reasons for the change here.

Variation of decision

It is very important to Vestry that it give this new plan the best chance of success, and that it seek to include both members of the former 9am service and of the former 10.30am service. Despite the fact that Vestry thought that a 10.30am time would facilitate best the hospitality opportunity of lunch after the service, it takes seriously representations it has received that some people from the former 9am service would simply not be able to attend a new service at 10.30am. An important priority for us is to take this new journey together with all the members of our church family who want to do that. **Vestry has therefore decided to change the timing of the new service to 10am.**

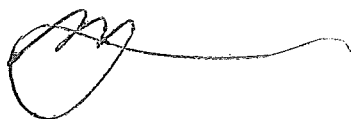
Comments have also been made about the technical difficulties that the band experiences in setting up their instruments and running sound tests prior to combined services. In the light of these comments **Vestry has decided to change the start date for the new service to 27 November 2016**, which is the latest day that we felt we could start the new service this year.

Conclusion

Vestry acknowledges that change is generally difficult and painful – and that it is even more painful for people who have been closely involved in shaping the structures that currently exist. We acknowledge that there have been lots of positive outcomes from the current service times and styles over the last 15 years or so. We also think that it is necessary to re-imagine our approach to the future for the reasons outlined above.

Parishioners' representations to Vestry have assisted us in making the variations above, which we hope people will find helpful. A 10am service will also more clearly be a new service with a new vision for the future. We would like to start consultation on the new service and the vision and timeline for it as soon as possible, and **invite all interested in planning for the service to attend a meeting at St James' Church, starting with a shared lunch at 12.30pm on Saturday 10 September.** This meeting will be only the first of many opportunities to have input into the new service. If you would like to attend the meeting but a lack of transport prevents you, please contact the parish office on 569-6737 by noon on Friday 8 September.

Yours sincerely



Mark Stone
Vicar's Warden



Allen Sutton
People's Warden