

8<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Friends

I wonder if you can call to mind a teacher or a mentor, someone who encouraged you, opened a door in your mind or imagination, who gave you an opportunity, who inspired you with confidence and gave you courage to dare and to dream?

We all need people like that. I think about the kindness of a teacher who gave me sanctuary in her specialist classroom when I was struggling to read and am full of gratitude because this gave me hope that despite the near impossible challenge of spelling English words that all was not lost.

In writing to Timothy who was like a son to him, St Paul said 'Fan into flame the gift you received through the laying on of my hands, for God hasn't given you a spirit of cowardice but a spirit of power and love and self-discipline.' Paul knew Timothy well and Timothy has been privileged to learn through sharing in Paul's ministry. Paul mentored Timothy and no doubt Timothy learned to put into practice all that he knew that was good in what he knew of Paul.

We all need to be mentored and we can all serve as mentors. Put simply there are many things you could teach me if I were willing to listen and many things you could teach if you were willing to share them.

Sometimes this requires a willingness to cross the boundaries between generations and cultures, language, and personality but remarkable things do happen, and people grow when these kind of relationships develop. I have seen this happen again and again over the years and I see it happening at New North Road too. I often find that when I teach, I am also being taught because I discover gifts in the person that I am teaching that inspire me. Some of the people I have mentored over the years have proved to be much more able and gifted than I am but that's a great thing too.

I wonder if that verse from 2 Timothy 1 vs 6 and 7 could be our verse of the year at New North Road next year?

I like the idea of adopting a verse for the year that would act as a signpost for where we need to focus our energy and our goals in the coming year. It signposts the way to

creating a culture of apprenticeship among us, a willingness to mentor and include, encourage, and enable more people to share in the things we do well.

Of course, this is challenging because it requires of me a willingness to give time to somebody else, especially when it would be so much easier to do the thing myself. It requires patience, a willingness to explain and to let someone else make their own mistakes and even fail. This can be frightening but it's the pathway to growth. People grow in confidence as they discover and develop new skills and their progress is celebrated and the whole community grows as more people share in what we do.

What it doesn't mean is slotting square pegs in round holes. It does mean being open to the gifts people offer and creating opportunities for them to use them not squeezing them into the things that need doing. Even though there may be some conspicuous gaps we can be confident that in one way or another God has equipped his body to serve and where there are conscious gaps it may be an invitation to think differently about how we do things.

I wonder what you could teach someone else and how you could mentor them?

Barbara Trigg has given us a really good example of doing this recently in the wonderful video she has prepared of how to make Christmas Angels. You can see some of these in the foyer of the church and on the website where there are some great photographs of the church being decorated for Christmas.

As we anticipate a new year, I hope 2021 will also be a year of apprenticeship and growth at New North Road in which we all can all play a part in teaching and being taught, mentoring and being mentored, in encouraging and enabling each other to grow.

Your friend and pastor

Mark

