

22nd February 2021

Dear Friends

This pastoral letter focusses on our prayer goals for 2021 remembering that Jesus encouraged us to persevere in prayer and never give in. Thank you to everyone who suggested ideas. We have tried to reflect and include them in the prayer goals below.

In a football match everyone lives for a moment when the goal goes between the posts and your team scores, but when players are preparing for a match, they do much more than focus on that moment, their training takes account of everything that builds up to that moment, the teamwork, discipline, the skills required to pass the ball, receive the ball and make a tackle but the goal is clear, to score a goal. In the same way we can focus on the goal but be mindful of that is required to build up to that point. Jesus does this in the Lord's prayer. He invites us to pray 'your Kingdom come' which is the goal and adds 'Your will be done' which can include all the small but significant things that build up to that goal, the small moments of grace, serendipity (happy chances) and obedience that make the goal possible. In other words, we can pray 'big' and pray 'small' at the same time.

So, let me introduce the goals one by one.

1. That we will make a good recovery from the pandemic; making time to grieve, to remember and to give thanks for the goodness of God, the compassion of so many people and giving thanks for life saving vaccines.

It is nearly a year since 'life' as we knew it was put on indefinite hold. Thanks be to God that the new vaccines offer the hope that we can overcome this virus and for the people who served on the front line in the NHS and all the carers we applauded who have made such a difference. God is good. At the same time, we recognize that there have been many deaths and that people have not been able to grieve as they would choose to and that we have all experienced the same trauma because no one is untouched by the pandemic. The deacons at New North Road have resolved to invite the whole of our church to focus on wellbeing and recovery as we move through 2021, taking gentle steps, like people who are learning to walk again. I hope we can do some

things that will demonstrate a renewed exuberance and love for life including an open-air picnic in the summer.

2. That God will strengthen our provision for children and young people as we welcome their presence and their gifts

This goal returns from 2021. We have some wonderful children, young people and young adults among us and their different contributions make a real difference and bring smiles to our faces. Please remember our Sunday teachers and helpers' team when we return to a more familiar rhythm of junior church on alternate Sundays.

In 2022 we need to continue nurturing and encouraging our children, young people and their families. Home schooling through the pandemic and not being able to attend college or university, often denied face to face learning has not been easy and it will be a great thing when these doors open again.

At New North Road I hope we will have the opportunity to welcome visiting school children on class visits as we register with Kirklees as a place of worship that welcomes educational visits and I hope we can form a small team of people who can help facilitate this.

3. That we will be open to the God of surprises and the opportunities he gives to love, to give, to serve and to receive.

2021 was been a year of surprises, welcome and unwelcome. This goal that has returned from 2021 is here again to encourage us to grasp the opportunities that God gifts us and be willing to recognise and embrace them.

4. That wherever democracy and freedom are endangered or fear and suspicion divide people from each other, that God will raise up women and men of peace with the courage to stand up for justice and seek reconciliation.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed as if democracy and the freedoms of a more open society would prove irresistible. Living in a democracy can be disappointing but it is so much better than the alternatives. In 2021 we witnessed the erosion of freedom in many nations notably Hong Kong have reminded us we cannot take our hard-earned freedoms for granted. For me, the most alarming events took place in the

United States where the outgoing president deliberately lied about the election and incited an insurrection, feeding a culture of suspicion and fear. As I write tens of thousands of people are protesting the army's seizure of power in Myanmar (Burma). Let us pray for our world and the peace of our neighbours.

5. That God will renew within us a sense of calling to be disciples of Jesus that we may grow in faith, in hope and in love, welcoming the gifts and the presence of people who can help us do this together in the name of Christ.

We are called to be disciples, to make 'the long walk of obedience in the same direction' and to be good companions, encouraging each other on the way. This prayer goal reflects the desire at the heart of our covenant service that we walk together and watch over one another we seek to follow Jesus Christ. This isn't just about what we do but about giving time to focus on God as we read scripture and pray.

6. That we will experience a renewed sense of who we are called to be as a town center church and a renewed confidence in our vision with courage to pursue it.

This prayer goal returns because we were making a beginning at revisioning when the coronavirus epidemic began and so we shall return to this focus in the coming year.

So here is an invitation to pray 'big' and pray 'small'. You may want to focus on one of these goals and make it your own or seek to remember them all. You may want to be mindful of what is happening locally, nationally and internationally as you pray. You may want to identify small but significant things that build or lead towards a goal as you pray.

Pray

Your friend and pastor

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