

"This  
is  
what  
I see"



A VISION  
FOR GK CHURCH

I asked God to show me his church in this place; what's already flourishing, and the greater flourishing he is calling us towards, and this is what I see:

I see a full and buzzing church, 200 or 300 strong. It has wide open doors, through which everyone is welcome, whatever they believe or don't believe; whether they're regular church goers or haven't set foot in a building like this since their last School Nativity play 40 years ago; I see people coming whose lives are going really well and others for whom things are really difficult.

I see people here who have given their lives to Jesus Christ and long to serve him and his people more fully; people who are ready to take risks and to give things up - even significant things - in order to serve God.

I see others here who know God is real, or think they know God is real, and who are finding out more - even if they're a bit unsure whether they're sure about that.

I see others here who wouldn't call themselves Christian, and who aren't quite sure what they make of all this God-stuff, but are drawn here for something.

All are welcomed, all are invited in, all are made to feel at home.

What's also very clear, as I look around, is that Jesus is at the centre. He is everywhere I look. Grace-fully, generously and with great love, it is Jesus that animates and inspires everything going on. I see him being spoken about from the front. I see people praying to him at the edge. I hear worship and music directed towards him, I sense hearts that are open to him and I witness lives being changed by him.

The doors are wide, wide open to everyone and it is Jesus who is absolutely and clearly the centre and the focus.

And the conversations that people are having are woven through with discussions about Jesus, the bible, God and prayer. But these conversations are about real life and the real issues that everyone is facing; parenting, work, stress, families, neighbours, local and national politics. People here are clearly discovering that faith has the very best answers to the questions of modern life with all its ups and downs.

When I look at this church it's clear this community is rooted in rich and deep soil - these people are at home with the great and diverse traditions of the church - and they are clearly letting those traditions shape them in a world of iphones, Snapchat and Twitter.

And wherever I look, I see children and teenagers, and it's clear that they are at home here. I see them sharing their ideas and thoughts with the adults and being taken seriously. I see that there are things for them to do, places for them to learn and to grow in faith, there are ways for them to serve, activities which show they are taken seriously, not as the church of tomorrow, but as the church here today. I see them in groups with other kids of their age, and I see them obviously at ease with people of different ages as well.

And as I listen to people around the local villages as they chat, there's a clear message out there - people say 'if you've got kids or teenagers, you should really find out what's going on in Church - they are a key local resource; Cafe Toddlers, Sunday Club, Parenting courses, Youth Alpha, kids groups, film club, Mental Health support - you really must check them out.'

And back in church, when I hear people talking about their faith, it's clear that there are very different traditions here. Some love to praise God with music and songs, hands raised and the beat kicking out from the drums up front. Others seek quiet and stillness. Some love the order and depth of liturgy, especially the communion, others love it when the Holy Spirit is allowed to lead and nobody is quite sure where things are heading. I see these people, with such different backgrounds, talking freely with one another about why they love what they love, and equally ready to listen and learn from what matters to the other.

And often these different people, with their different traditions, worship at different services - some here, some in Christ Church - perhaps in the future in other places as well. There are thriving traditional

communions, lively family focussed services and free and informal times of worship. Each of them is flourishing.

And as I look, I see that people are leaving the building. And it's very clear that 'church' is much more than an hour on Sunday - it's a living, breathing community that exists every day of the week. What's going on inside the building is just a gathering together before everyone heads out to the places where God has called them to be his people.

And this community is made up of people with very different lives; different family situations, different jobs, different priorities - but there are some clear and consistent themes.

For one thing, everyone seems ready to serve. It's being done in different ways, depending on their time and gifts, but everyone is aware of the needs of the world. For many, this service is in small acts of kindness and love to neighbours and friends. For some though, there are new projects up and running, or long standing projects that they are deeply involved with. And these projects are providing amazing practical care to needy people, and are doing so in the name of Jesus.

And another thing I see - at home, or on the train, or at work, or on a dog walk, people are praying and reading their bibles. Not because someone has told them they should, but just because it's what they do; it's how they get through the day; it's how they discover their priorities; how they live whole and deep lives.

And it's clear that many of them are meeting up on a regular basis with others from the church. Some meet in homes, others in pubs and cafes, or here in the church. And in their groups they have built strong, enduring friendships, they share the ups and downs of life, pray together and open the bible to learn about the God they have met, and who they want to get to know better.

And they're also, many of them, both children and adults, remarkably free in the way they speak about their faith to others - at work, in the playground and shops, with their family and friends. They do it gently and naturally, and they're really good at inviting people to look the possibility that God might be real - and as a result, the response they get is warm and grateful, and so more and more people are coming to know Jesus Christ for themselves.

In the gospel we heard a few minutes ago, St John wrote *'These Easter stories are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing have life in his name'*

We are God's Easter people in this place. He has called us to life in his name. He has given us so much already. And there is much still to be done.

There are so many people who long to be loved, so many people whose lives feel unfulfilled, so many people who feel ashamed and guilty and yearn for forgiveness.

There are so many people who, over the years, have tried church out but didn't stick. All those who think Christianity is boring, irrelevant and out of touch. All those who have never been told that God is pure, overflowing, grace-filled love.

All those that God needs us to invite, so they can belong and believe and in turn become servants of His beautiful, broken world.

That, I believe is His vision and our call.

And I asked God to help us bring this to reality. May it be so, may it be so.

Amen