



*St Luke's in the City*

150 years - 2009

# **Celebrating at the Crossroads**

## **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

20 April 2008

Dear Friends,

When it comes to 'mission' the Church often seems torn between two apparently contradictory stances – either 'membership', or 'social service'. Church growth in the case of the former, means building up the numbers, in the case of the latter doing more useful things in the world. Defenders of the first position feel 'successful' as measured by attendance, income statistics, and public declarations of faith. Defenders of the second group feel 'successful' as measured by programmes, social services and open dialogue with 'outsiders'.

As a rough rule of thumb, people outside the church find the former group less sociable, more likely to be at odds with the culture, the latter group more 'user-friendly'. But there is a willingness to turn a blind eye to the former so long as there seems to be a healthy dose of the latter. So for instance, there is mostly a happy agnosticism among those who have nothing to do with church about the ways and means that church people go about building their membership, so long as church agencies like the City Mission and the Salvation Army are seen to be helping the poor and needy, and churches run playgroups for children and youth groups for teenagers.

After all, most people don't really want to have to be involved with the poor and needy, young mothers are often so desperate for some adult company, and anyone who works with teenagers deserves a medal! So the strange, and sometimes downright dangerous, ideas of church people can be readily overlooked because important social needs are met.

This dualism is, of course, a tragic distortion. The mission of the church cannot be measured by either the statistics or the social works. Full buildings, bank accounts and heroic testimonies do not make the church. Nor do social works and being user-friendly make the church. Any well-run business can sell hamburgers and increase its market share – that is not the church. Any organisation can run programmes and services for the poor and needy and be friendly – that is not the church either.

On this Annual Meeting of Parishioners Sunday - a quiver-full of plans and schemes before us, a busy Sesquicentenary year ahead of us – let us remember that these things in themselves do not make us Church, those baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ. Let us be sure that everything we plan is determined by our main business – union with the Father, through Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life.

With my love,  
David