

## Vision for 2018 – A Season of Sowing ('TRY')

It's always good at the start of a new year to spend time asking ourselves the questions: where are we now? Where do we want to go in 2018?

You may remember that our text for this year was 'Build Up the Walls', by which we meant, become more visible in the community. And by God's grace we've done that: we've made great connections with Walton Community Council, we hosted the Mayor's Civic Service, our coffee morning has never been so popular and we now have the community nurses looking at a possible baby weigh-in clinic as part of it. We've prayer walked every month, run 2 quiz nights for 60 people each, hosted a talk on autism awareness and developed better links with local schools than ever. We've bought 2 new banners, put in a new sound system half financed by local grants and tidied up the front face of our churchyard. We have openings to talk with Wavendon Parish Council about how to use the old school buildings when St Mary's School moves, and the Diocese has now formally agreed to give us a new Pioneer Minister to work in the new housing estate and, God willing, plant a new church in the new church school which opens in September 2019.

That's a lot of progress in a year! (Take a moment.) And we give thanks to God for all of it. It's God who calls us heavenwards, and he has honoured the word he gave us.

But what will guide us in 2018? I want to suggest that this year is a Season of Sowing. The inspiration for this is from Psalm 126 and I believe this is our text for 2018 (turn to p624). You can read the whole thing at your leisure, but first we want to use v3 to give thanks for 2017 (READ). Then our text for this year is v4-5

*'Restore our fortunes O Lord, like streams in the desert/Negev.  
Those who sows in tears will reap with songs of joy'*

This is a psalm all about God doing a new thing after a difficult season – and we've had that. As a church, we've had to face some hard times over the last 10-15 years. As we've reflected together recently, the church has faced declining attendance, financial struggles, and just in the last 15 months we've said goodbye to 5 of our saints: we give thanks for the faithful life and witness of Dorothy, Eric, John, Ann and June.

But I believe we've turned a corner. As I shared with the church council in December, despite these sad farewells, our average number of adults attending in 2017 was the same as in 2016. We've welcomed new people, and we have all these opportunities to look forward to.

**It is a new season, a season of sowing.** A chance to make good on the opportunities which now face us. But the verses remind us of some key things we must hold onto as we commit I hope to an exciting year to come:

- It's God who restores our fortunes – this psalm is a prayer and not just a song
- There is a cost – some of our sowing may yield tears
- But in order to reap we have to sow it's great to build up the walls but unless we act on those opportunities they will remain just that – only 'possibilities'

*This* is our season of sowing. And as I close I have a one word summary for you, one we can all remember: **TRY**

I don't mean Try Harder – what I mean is that we have a 'have a go' culture. We're not afraid to try new things and see how they go. In fact we've got 2 starting in January:

New regular quiz night – Colin kindly leading this for us – first one 23<sup>rd</sup> January. Not a fundraiser, simply a chance to open ourselves more to the community and build more social life.

New approach to all age – (currently not working) so on 14<sup>th</sup> January at 9.30am we'll have breakfast together and then have a shorter act of worship starting about 10am – this will have core elements of worship and prayer but the teaching element will be built around discussions. Also allows BCP and 9.30 congreys to eat together (start 9.20ish).

I don't know if either of these will fly – they might go great, they might not. But that's not the point – we're going to TRY. We're going to celebrate successes *and* we're going to celebrate failures. We're going to be accountable to each other too, so that what we do, we do together and we support each other in it.

*2018 is a season of sowing. It's a season to TRY new things. If you want to try something come and talk to me. And may we all 'press on towards the goal for which God has called us heavenwards in Christ Jesus.' Amen.*