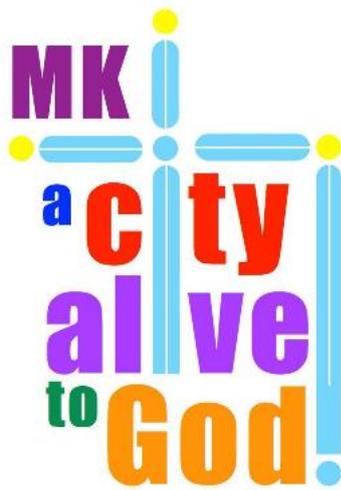




Mission Partnership Newsletter
October 2018

Dear Friends,

In a poem which marks a critical turning point for R.S. Thomas, he resolves to go “onward to the tall city of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit.” Thomas is writing here about the experience of prayer, but the words could easily be applied to Milton Keynes and the challenge of being the church here. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to claim that Milton Keynes has always been a laboratory: experiment is in its DNA. That is true of the initial planning of the city, of the way that the plan has developed and changed and of the



church as an integral part of the city. If the first phase of the experiment has matured for good and ill over the 50 years of its trial, then that should not be taken to mean that experiment has ended. On the contrary, it is clear that with the expansion of the city, its place at the centre of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the ambitions for a SMART city symbolised by a new university, a second and more complex phase of experimentation is on the immediate horizon. The dust sheets are being taken off the laboratory. For the church to respond to this emerging city requires us to recover that experimental spirit for ourselves, to find the courage and the inner resource to rise to a new future, to dare to take the risks which experiment involves. Only so will we keep pace with the city, only so will we find a way to thrive.

Such a demand is critical for the church in Milton Keynes, but it is also, perhaps, critical for the wider church: if Milton Keynes is at the cutting edge of change, then so is the church here. For the church as a whole to thrive into the future, it will need to thrive in Milton Keynes. That strikes me as an extraordinary challenge, an exciting opportunity and a wonderful privilege. We will need to embrace such a vocation (for that is what it is) wholeheartedly and enthusiastically. As a vocation it is in equal parts daunting and thrilling: exactly what you would expect from any worthwhile experiment. But far more important than our immediate emotional reaction is the observation that this is a “laboratory of the spirit”, the place where we will find the Holy Spirit of God forging the future in and through us as we offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” as Paul puts it in Romans. We will become more human, more deeply resonant with God, more alive and the city become alive to God which is its and our true and best future.

Every Blessing,
John