

EUCCHARIST ON ADVENT SUNDAY 2016  
TO MARK THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF SELE FARM CHURCH.

This is Advent Sunday, the beginning and the end of the church's year. The great themes of Advent are the four Last Things- heaven and hell and death and judgment. But for today, we can postpone those and enjoy a time of celebration- celebration of the first forty years of Sele Farm Church. I suppose that means about 2,000 services and about 8,000 hymns. The mind boggles and the heart rejoices.

Every year we have to send a statistical report to the Diocese, with all kinds of information.

I have been doing that for several years and it is not my favourite task.

In recent times, one of the questions has been

–what Fresh Expressions of Church have there been?

“Fresh Expressions of Church” has a flavour about it of experimental youthful worship, earnest social intentions and maybe a lot of guitars – but really it is about exploring ways of doing church which are not just clergy-led occasions in established ecclesiastical buildings.

Partly with my tongue in my cheek, but mostly quite seriously, for the past few years I have recorded Sele Farm Church as a Fresh Expression.

I know that you have conventional forms of worship, and I know there are not many teenagers and I know you have been around for some years and I know that you are almost a guitar-free zone, but....

Sele Farm Church fits well into the pattern of a Fresh Expression.

The original impetus came from within the community, you embrace Christians of different traditions and most services are led by lay people, including learners – including me. I preached my first sermon at a Sele Farm Church service in the old Community Centre – the one where the walls wobbled if there was a strong wind. If I remember right, it was a sermon about Moses in Exodus arguing with God by the burning bush in the wilderness and complaining that he could not go back to Egypt to lecture Pharaoh and rescue the children of Israel because he did not know how to speak convincingly – which I guess made it a self-referential post-modern sermon.

Your worship has taken place in community buildings mainly devoted to secular uses. Over the years you have enjoyed the hospitality of the old Sele Farm Community centre; then of St Andrew's School (lovingly prepared by the Caretaker – have you ever seen such shining floors?); and now Calton Court.

The original Christian communities did not worship or meet in purpose-built Christian churches – there were no such things until about 300AD. They borrowed synagogues, private houses, secular buildings, underground caves and open spaces.

How ministry was organised then is a matter of debate but it was certainly less defined than it is now.

What was reckoned as authoritative scripture was only settled later.

They certainly sang psalms and hymns but they probably did not have too many guitars.

So Sele Farm Church is within a venerable Christian tradition. Venerable does not mean static or exhausted, so this is an opportunity to look back and thank all those who started Sele Farm Church and who have sustained it these past 40 years; and to look forward.

So, here is to the next 40 years!