

Strategic Planning Newsletter No.2

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the second of the Strategic Planning 2019 Newsletters. This week I want to start exploring the Seven Marks of a healthy church in preparation for our June 1 Healthy Churches Check Day. Please note this date in your diary, it is an important day in the life of our church. The day will commence at 10am and conclude about 3pm.

MARK1: ENERGIZED BY FAITH

Rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive.

- *Worship and sacramental life: move people to experience God's love*
- *Motivation: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another*
- *Engages with Scripture: in creative ways that connect with life*
- *Nurtures faith in Christ: helping people to grow in, and share, their faith.*

It is faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit that is the source of vitality in the life of a healthy church. As we are aware, certainly in this diocese, different traditions express this in a variety of ways. However, regardless of these differences, there are three common things that represent a healthy church. The first is prayer. In a healthy church prayer sits squarely at the centre and is a natural part of both the personal and church life of parish members. Faith is talked about as a natural part of life and conversation. Finally, the name of Christ is not a source of embarrassment. These are the ideas that need to be top of mind as we reflect on how we want to score our church. To help us a bit more, I have fleshed out the bullet points.

1. Worship and sacramental life: move people to experience God's love

Within our services we have those who 'lead' the service and those who 'participate'. The manner in which each plays their part determines the true outcome of our worship. There is a subtle yet profound difference between 'taking the service' and 'leading worship.' The focus of the former is on following the liturgy or order of service. The focus of the latter is on helping people to encounter the presence of God. This is likely to involve an ability to be comfortable with the use of silence to enable people to hear what God is saying to them.

Participants in acts of worship have just as vital a part to play as those who lead it. Participants as well as leaders need to be willing to give ourselves to God in openness and loving attention to Him in our worship. It is important to not just follow the order or service but to embrace the sense of celebration of the reality and goodness of God. Fully engaging also means that parishioners will also be to engage with the pain and brokenness in the world around and with their own joy and pain. So, joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, will be in evidence.

So as you think further about this aspect of the mark, reflect on how the various services assist you in engaging in your relationship with God, but also how you feel that you are able to be led into the nearer presence of God.

2. Motivation: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another

When this is in evidence, people want to serve God and one another, and this results in a sense eagerness and enthusiasm around the place. Where this is not present, the church is likely to suffer from a lack of energy, with a small group doing all the work. This sometimes happens because newcomers are kept out of active involvement in the life of

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the church for fear they might cause things to change. Where there is motivation only from secondary matters it will often be seen in competing personal agendas, personality clashes and power struggles.

When you think of the motivation aspect, how do we as a church desire to serve one another, is there energy in this?

3. Engages with Scripture: in creative ways that connect with life

This is more than simply claiming to be a church that “preaches the Word” or whatever phrase resonates with you. Rather, it is about how Scripture is handled both in the pulpit and in personal and group reflection. We need to recognise that there are other ways in which we can engage with the scriptures, so how does that occur here at St. Johns, but probably more importantly how are you able to interact with the Scriptures here?

When you think on this, try to think about how our use of the Scriptures in this church helps you relate to life today and how it can and should be allowed to affect our values, choices and lifestyle.

4. Nurtures faith in Christ: helping people to grow in, and share, their faith.

Churches that score highly in this mark do not take their faith as an assumption. Rather it is spoken about and seen as central to the task of the church. People are helped to reflect on their own experience of the grace and reality of God in their life-or to address the lack of it. They will be helped to tell their own story, whether of their earlier journey to faith or of their current experience of the journey of faith. This frequently results in an awareness of sharing in a common enterprise that, at its heart has a spiritual base.

This will be so largely irrespective of whether a church Mission Statement exists or not. In such churches evangelism will be taking place irrespective of whether such sharing of the faith is organized or not and largely irrespective of whether the word evangelism is used or not.

So when you think on this aspect of the mark reflect on how you have been helped to grow in your faith, and whether others you are aware of have had a similar or different experience to yours.

For Reflection

Read Colossians 3.17

- What is special about the church?
- What kind of changes are we called to make?
- What kind of change might we need to make to be energized by faith?

Matthew 15.21-28: why did Jesus seem to be playing “hard to get?”

Alternative passages

Luke 1.39-45: what is happening here?

Micah 5.25 (and Galatians 4.19) what are we, as a church, meant to be pregnant with?

Meditation

The church is called on to embody the life of Jesus who said “The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing.” (John 5.19)