

Strategic Planning Newsletter No.4

Dear Friends,

This week we look at Mark 3, “Seeks to find out what God wants. It has been long agreed that the major reason the early church was so successful in spreading the gospel in the early days was a new purpose for life had come into being. Then the Greek gods were a frightening and unpredictable lot, much like the Roman authorities. Today, our world is much the same, unpredictable, and a bit frightening, or at least unsettling for many. The reality is God is at work in the world He created, and our purpose is to find out what that is, and align our efforts to His. Too easily the church fails to grasp the scope of its calling in this dimension of its life.

MARK 3: SEEKS TO FIND OUT WHAT GOD WANTS

discerning the Spirit's leading rather than trying to please everyone.

- vocation: seeks to explore what God wants it to be and do
- vision: develops and communicates a shared sense of where it is going
- mission priorities: consciously sets both immediate and long term goals
- able to call for and make, sacrifices personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith

In times of struggle and difficulty it is too easy or tempting to draw resources *into* the church, rather than *turn out* in loving concern for the wider world.

- **vocation: seeks to explore what God wants it to be and do**

Both words are important here, being and doing. Indeed, our observation has been that healthy churches are more aware of, and put more effort into their being than unhealthy churches. Healthy churches care about the quality of what is done, about how people feel, about the nature of the relationships within the church and the impact of the whole life of the church on a local community. This sense of vocation is found in the lives of individual members who, being energized by faith, have a sense of God calling them to contribute what they do in and through the life of the church. Tough though it is, the vocation of the church is quite simple. Our calling is to nurture a loving relationship to God, to one another within the church and the world around us.

As you seek to score this mark, think about how we seek to “be” the people of God, and “do” what He wants us to do. Are we living out our true vocation?

- **vision: develops and communicates a shared sense of where it is going**

This is not primarily about having a Mission Statement, as these can easily mask a lack of vision. That is because a formula of words is sought with the best of intentions to embrace everything that is currently being done. Above all, though, we need to have a “Kingdom Vision.” The kingdom of God is an expression of both His nature and his purposes. It is a living dynamic reality. Is our vision “shrinking” or “growing?” Vision can grow as we press on in prayer and service.

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What matters is that in our praying, planning, and reflecting on our work we hold on to the bigger vision of the “kingdom of God” rather than simply running activities.

How do we measure up with our vision? Are we more interested in doing activities for activity sake, or are we truly concerned for the vision of the Kingdom?

- **mission priorities: consciously sets both immediate and long term goals**

One of the ‘unhealthy’ ways in which vision and vocation get stuck is that they are left in the abstract as things we are in favour of, but they never become expressed in action or affect what is done. Healthy churches, on the other hand take their sense of vocation, and their vision, sufficiently seriously to do something about it. Sometimes the action they take is to dare to stop some activity altogether. Certainly stopping for long enough to discern just what it is that God is calling us to is a sign of health. Frantic activity in a thousand directions is not a good sign in an individual or a church. This is where this mark and the seventh mark (doing a few things and doing them well) usually work together. When a church takes time to discern God’s call on its life it will end up doing a few things and doing them well.

As you think on this mark, reflect on what are our immediate term, medium term and long term goals? Are they clear? Are we achieving them?

- able to call for and make, sacrifices personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith

Essentially what is happening when this mark is evident in a church is that the church’s spirituality (first mark) is engaging with its sense of mission (second mark). By a process of prayerful reflection, a corporate sense of direction emerges and people discover their own sense of vocation within that broader vision.

As you think about this part of the mark how do we as a church make sacrifices? What have they been? What sacrifices do we make for God in our own lives, and do those sacrifices if any at all translate into our life here at St. Johns?

Study Passages

Luke 10.38-11.13

- What is Christianity, and so the church about?
- What place do silence and reflection have in our life and church?
- What really matters in life?

Colossians 3:1-14: what sort of church might God want to join?

Meditation

The church is called to express the life of Jesus Christ who, as a child said

I must be in my Father’s house. (Luke 2.49)

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