

# Strategic Planning Newsletter No.3

Dear Friends,

This week we look at Mark 2, Outward-looking focus. This is an important aspect of any faith community. I do hope that you have already marked your diary for June 1 from 10am-3pm for this important event in our church life. Please take the time to read through each newsletter, and keep it ready to hand as necessary. Please use this time to prayerfully think about our parish and what we need to do to continue the mission God is already at work in here.

## MARK 2: OUTWARD-LOOKING FOCUS

*With a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern*

- Deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- Passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally
- Makes connections between faith and daily living
- Responds to human needs by loving service

It is a general given that churches who are inward focussed tend to shrink, and churches that look out and beyond themselves grow. This has been proven time and time again in church research. A ghetto church hides from life. The starting point for growing churches is the world around and the whole of life. They demonstrate in their life the truth that no group is happy or healthy unless it has a task to fulfil beyond its self.

- **Deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks**

Churches of this sort do not need to know all the answers or always be the ones who solve problems. They are able to offer what they can and are willing to work as partners alongside others. In fact they have a considerable knowledge of the local area being aware of both the joys and sorrows around them, but are not inclined to push their solutions all the time.

*So as you think on this mark consider how we engage with those around us. How are we doing? What are we doing well, what are we doing not so well? Further, think on how we might improve or change (This would be for further reflection, not for actual marking the church.*

- **Passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally**

Such churches are living out the words of David Bosch that 'to participate in mission is to participate in love, for God is a fountain of sending love'. They care about the world around them and their immediate locality too.

*As you consider your response here, how do we speak out about global issues, is that something we want to do? Do you think we show our love beyond our parish boundaries?*

- **Makes connections between faith and daily living**

Too easily a person's 'ministry' is defined in terms of what they do in the life of the church. But the fact is that 'for the vast majority of laity ... the main focus of their ministry lies in the opportunities presented by their everyday responsibilities'. Healthy churches recognize that and work to equip church members to live the faith in the whole of life. They see this as of greater importance than getting everyone to do something in church. Indeed, this is the key to healthy evangelism when people find in their faith the

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resources for living that help them make sense of life live by a different set of values and have something to share with others about making sense of life.

In the early church there is this understanding of the “priesthood of all believer.” This does not mean that in a community of 20 people there are 20 “priests.” There is one – the believing community. The role of the priest is to act as a mediator between the people and God. In the “priesthood of all believers” the one community of faith is to make the connection between faith and daily living. This means everything around the community of faith, which inevitably means the wider secular community.

*How do we as a community of faith make that connection of faith with the wider community?*

## ▪ Responds to human needs by loving service

These churches are on the ‘give’ rather than the ‘get’. They are operating on the abundance mentality of the gospel well expressed in the Christian Aid aim that ‘all shall be included in the feast of life’. This response is very striking, as in the care some churches show towards Asylum Seekers, and those who are disabled tor, as some prefer, ‘differently abled’) and Travellers. In other situations it is not so much a case of ‘what you do’, but ‘how you do it.’

These are just some of the ways and stories, of churches that have an attractive outward-looking focus. Such churches are full of stories of how God has been experienced ‘out there’ in daily life and in the local community. These are stories about things happening in the community, not just in the church. In such situations people sometimes cannot refrain from telling good news: ‘we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard’. This healthy focus is often evident in the intercessions in Sunday services, They have an inclusive, life-affirming breadth that speaks of a good and generous God being worshipped in this place.

*Churches with these characteristics are deeply attractive because their focus is not on themselves and their programmes but on God’s goodness and reality and on the world around them. They are indeed living the two great commandments. How are we doing?*

## Study passages

Luke 10.28-37

- What does it cost to be a Good Samaritan?
- Who are our ‘neighbours’ today?
- Who is calling out for our help in the world around us?

Isaiah 42.1-9: what is church for?

## Meditation

The church is called to express the life of Jesus Christ whose whole ministry was shaped by the conviction that;

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. (John 3:16)

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