

Strategic Planning Newsletter No.5

Dear Friends,

This week we look at Mark 4, “Faces the cost of change and growth.: My own personal view is that this is the most challenging of all the marks. In a sea of constant change, the one thing we want to have is a stable church environment. Change is confronting, it unsettles us, growth, while we often seek it verbally, mentally we know it will cause change and thus we subconsciously avoid it. We can see that the changes and the growth that are already occurring here are causing consternation for some, so we need to be sensitive to such, but that should not deter us from pursuing a strategy for change and growth.

MARK 4: FACES THE COST OF CHANGE AND GROWTH

rather than resisting change and fearing failure

- While embracing the past it dares to take on new ways of doing things
- Takes risks: admits when things are not working and learns from experience
- Crises: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community
- Positive experiences of change: however small, are affirmed and built on.

Healthy churches face the cost of change and growth rather than resisting or running from change, They are prepared to take carefully considered risks whilst unhealthy ones fear failure and so dare not act. The fact is that change is a sign of life and growth: it is also a fact of life. All of us are changing all the time; indeed not a single atom now contributing to the make-up of our physical being was part of our body seven years ago. However many misunderstand change, not least in the life of the church and think it means changing some organizational aspect, such as the liturgical form of worship the times of Sunday services, or the church building. The truth is that real change is a change of heart, As it has been noted in other places, ‘changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills, beliefs’. That is what real change is about.

- **While embracing the past it dares to take on new ways of doing things**

We need to be able to improvise here in the church. That is recognised by almost everyone looking at what makes a healthy church. Broadly speaking that improvising comes in two shapes, the evolutionary and the revolutionary. It either takes what is and reworks it, or else it seeks to begin again. It is good to be alive to both those options. We see it today in the larger scene of the life of the Church. The evolutionary mode is about the Church operating in inherited mode, making ‘church as we know it’ work in today’s changed and changing setting. The revolutionary way is to start with a new group in a new setting and work out together how to nourish and express our faith. Often a combination is required.

As you seek to score this mark, think about how we seek to improvise, or adapt and change. How well are we doing here at St. Johns?

- **Takes risks: admits when things are not working and learns from experience**

There can be no guarantee of ‘success’ in this life, so faith often shows itself in a willingness to follow a hunch or conviction. The original children’s ministry initiative failed. Or, did it? Was it not a necessary part on the journey to having such a ministry,

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and then learning from what worked and what didn't work? We haven't had a specific children's' ministry for some years here at St. John, but that doesn't mean it won't work again. Or the disaster that was the SeaCEBS wasn't a complete disaster, for it was very successful for many years. We need to be willing to take risks for the future, and not be enslaved to the events of the past.

As you think on this aspect of the mark, have we become risk averse? Where might we take risks, especially reinventing the past? What might we learn from the past?

- **Crises: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community**

Trees and even skyscrapers bend with the wind. Human beings make choices as they adapt to changed circumstances. So too do healthy churches. They are responsive rather than rigid and ploughing on regardless come what may. Our organ project was an example of a crisis in the church. How it was dealt with and the outcome might have some bearing on how you score this mark.

As you think on the mark, think about how crises have been dealt with in the church. Are we responding to perceived crises even now, or not?

- **Positive experiences of change: however small, are affirmed and built on.**

Sometimes churches have a large debit balance in their 'memory bank of change'. This means that building to a credit balance will take longer. However one of the ways of doing that is to have out in the open the negative experience and to explore what the church has learned, could learn, from those experiences. That can shift painful past experiences from the debit to the credit side of the account.

Can you think of some of the positive things that have happened here at St. Johns in the last few years? How have they worked? Might they be a sign that we can continue to do small things in a positive way and therefore truly seek to face the cost of change and growth?

Study Passages

Matthew 5.17-20

- Why do we find change so difficult?
- What needs changing?
- What helps us to change and be changed”?
- Can you think of a change for the better that has taken place in our church and what lessons can we draw from that?

Meditation

The church is called to express the life of Jesus Christ, who lived the truth that

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain-but if it dies it bears much fruit. (John 12.24)

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