

Mission Action Planning – Vision

Previously, we began to put all we have been considering into practice as we look at developing a parish Mission Action Plan (MAP) based on Jesus' discipling model of Engaging, Nurturing, Encountering the power of God through mission and Growing (see Luke 7-10). We've said that the purpose of a MAP is to develop disciples who grow the church and we've been praying for Jesus' guidance. So what's the next step? It is to discern what Jesus is calling you to do next as a Christian community.

So what is your vision? Perhaps you don't like that question. Perhaps the word 'vision' has been over-used. Okay then, let's look at it another way. Trusting as we do that, because we are His people and led by His Spirit, he will speak to our hearts: what is He laying on your heart? What do you care about? What direction of travel do you sense you are been led toward? What might God be calling you to do as the people you are? How are you gifted as a church family?

I say all this because many churches might, for example, want to do 'youth work' out of a desire to see more young people in church, and quite right, too. But, is that 'who you are' as a church family? Is there anyone gifted or experienced in youth work? To put items on a MAP for which no one is either gifted or experienced is to start in such a way that disappointment and discouragement are guaranteed. Who are you and what can you do right now? That is the place to start. Jesus will never ask us to do something for which He has not gifted us.

The following questions always help me sharpen my understanding of what our 'vision' might be and the direction that Jesus might be calling us. Some are more relevant at some times than others, but it's good to keep them together as a set.

- Who are we? Where we are at (spiritually and geographically)? What are we good at?
- Is our ministry aligned with who we are, where we are and what we are good at?
- What do we seem to be being led into?
- In what health/condition is the life of our church community? What is good? What needs addressing?

The Five Marks of Mission are also a good 'check-list' for a Missional Church:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

These are so important that they were added to the diocesan constitution in 2015. But please note: a healthy missional church has all five marks present. I have noted that there can too easily be a focus on marks 3-5. All are needed and necessary.

'Natural Church Development' tools, as offered to each church by Archdeacon Chris Pappas are also helpful to highlight what is good and what needs improving.

Once the reflection work is done, using these questions and tools, a sense of your vision – a 'direction of travel' – will emerge. That's where we'll pick it up next time.

With every blessing,
Richard