

## Mission Action Planning – Red Alert: What it means to be the Body of Christ

Let's pick up where we left off, dealing with 'Red Flag Alerts' that can come up while developing a parish Mission Action Plan (MAP). We looked at the process and the need for self-awareness. Now let's tackle the problems we encounter when we misunderstand what it means for a parish to be "the body of Christ," gifted for life together and the extension of the kingdom of God.

It's wonderful how the New Testament makes it very clear, in a number of places, how vital each one of us is, whether clergy or laity, to the ongoing missional life of the church. 1 Peter describes us as a royal priesthood, as living stones being built up into the holy temple in which God dwells. Paul describes us as a physical body in a crucial and somewhat neglected passage of the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 12:1-7. He describes in detail what it means for us to be the body of Christ; how "the same Lord" gives different gifts to every single one of us, all "for the common good."

We are so used to thinking of the church as a hierarchical institution that we find it hard to hear those passages in any other way except through the traditional model of the 'clergy' as the ones who 'do the ministry' which everyone else receives. What Paul describes here is much more exciting and life-giving for us all, both clergy and laity. It means every single one of us has as a gift to share for the common good. And that means the common good is minimized and diminished if the gifts of all are not encouraged and deployed.

There is nothing wrong with the structures of our church, but they must not lead us to believe that only the priest does the mission and ministry. Sometimes, it has to be said, clergy *like* to do all the mission and ministry, or have taken on the belief that it is all down to them. Sometimes parishes are very *happy* for the clergy to do all the mission and ministry. If either of these situations dominates, however, the whole mission and ministry of that particular church is one of diminished discipleship for all. Any MAP that is neither shaped by the gifts of those in the parish or does not encourage and utilize those gifts, is going to neither 'fit' nor encourage those upon whom the success of the plan depends.

So take it to heart: *you* have a gift to share; *you* are indispensable to the health and growth of your parish, and so is the person sitting next to you in the pew on Sunday, and the one next to them, and so on and so on. Build your Mission Action Plan upon the gifts that God has given you.

*With every blessing,*

*Richard*