

Moving Our Church from Maintenance to Mission

- These days we have heard a lot of what isn't working; we have briefly examined reasons that influence the growth and decline of churches (which, believe it or not, is a fairly recent phenomenon within Church circles). We have looked at one example of a church that seemingly is doing something right! What can we learn from that? It has often been the case that we write off such churches as experiments, flash in the pan, not really church, 'they are not us'! There is very powerful scriptural precedent that we need to listen to particularly in regards to Jesus and His relationship with the Pharisees
- Why is this important, because by reflecting on what has been happening over the last thirty years, where we have been and what challenges we have confronted, we can then learn to respond and adapt to be the Church in a way that confronts the realities of this new age. If we do not, we ignore such things at our own peril
- How then do we become the Church of this new age? A look at first century Christianity provides an answer. The nature of the early church can be understood in terms of two fundamental polarities- each of which existed in tension with the other; Building communities and making disciples. Then and now, these two polarities preserve and serve to fulfill one another- one is internally oriented and the other externally.
- As` a metaphor, these two polarities of community and mission are represented in the actions of Paul and Peter.
 - Paul represents mission, an external focus of the Church on making disciples – he left Jerusalem to preach the Gospel, particularly to the gentiles and to found churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece.
 - Peter, by contrast can be said to represent community, an internal focus of the Church on meeting the needs of the faithful. Although he participated in making disciples, his focus was on the Jewish Church.
- Although these polarities are in tension, both were and are necessary to a vital Church. (see power point presentation on web site)

- Over the past decades, however, the mainline churches have lost its emphasis on mission, concentrating instead on its members. Without mission, community in our church has come to mean little more than maintenance of the status quo. The Great Commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations has been lost as an essential part of the Christian faith, impoverishing our Church, reducing its membership and leaving us isolated from the very society we seek to help. Without external focus, the Church begins to die, like the Dead Sea without an outlet, fills with salt and cannot sustain life.
- Regaining this balance- moving from maintenance to mission – from inward looking to outward looking- will breathe new life into our faith communities.
- Time precludes detailed analysis of this process (see Reclaiming the Great Commission by Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley) but let me offer two models of mission emphasis.
- The First responds to the Bibby 80% who are spiritual- there is a deep spiritual yearning. People are asking deep spiritual questions- they are yearning for something more meaningful and more enduring. People are reeling emotionally from the trauma of daily life- too much to do, no time, violence etc. etc. As people seek and yearn, the Church must re-claim the seemingly lost or forgotten answers.
- This yearning for completeness, for joining of human life and experience to the power and love of God is the hunger that drives this search for spirituality. People want a experience of God; it is this experience of the Holy Spirit that change people and it is this that the unchurched seek.
- To feed the spiritually hungry in the midst of this great famine will require us to return to our early roots, the Great Commandment and Great Commission. Our role as Church, therefore, is not to create demand for religious experience within people but rather to address and effectively satisfy the demand that already exists. This point is crucial in understanding the importance of evangelism in Christian life. Spirituality is not about doing what we want but rather about doing what God wants.
- Example- We do not make disciples by telling them that what we have is 'good for them'- we make disciple by asking someone 'what do you need?', let us together discover if we can help you find that! IT IS ABOUT FINDING A

COMMUNITY WHERE WE BELONG, WHERE WE CAN ASK THE TOUGH QUESTIONS AND OUR QUESTIONS ARE RESPONDED TO IN LOVE.

- Second- We, the Church, must offer an outlet for spirituality through the opportunities of service to the world. Spirituality is faith carried into the world in thought word and deed. It provides a way of dealing more joyfully and effectively with the trials and triumphs of life.
- Many of call this Outreach and it must become more than a line item in a budget- it must become part of our fabric. Responding to the immense human need in our neighbourhoods- need oriented evangelism.

The Challenge of the Mission Church

- The single biggest factor why some churches in our diocese and in our nation are flourishing as signs of hope, it is where lives are shared consciously with the unchurched and the boundaries are blurred as to the insiders and outsiders. People find community and are having their spiritual needs met!
- If the Gospel is to make sense, it seems essential that unbelievers are embraced within the Christian community and can witness the life transforming practice of the Gospel. The commitment to 'believing' preceding belonging has been for a very long time the appropriate understanding of how you 'got in' to the church. This is no longer true and many churches are responding instinctively or deliberately to this by adopting a philosophy of 'belonging' before 'believing'- e.g. would be the concept of the 'Open Table' at communion or the policy of 'Open Baptism'
- The Good News is this is already happening in many places in our Diocese.