

Sermon - Mission: our Action Plan

Based on: Psalm 107.1-9, 47; and Ken Morgan's *Pathways: Local Mission for All Kinds of Churches*

Summarising the previous 4 sermons

- During the Sundays of this month we have been getting to grips with where we are, here at St John the Divine, with regard to our current mission plan.
- We started by being reminded that we are each *called* to be a disciple of Jesus, and then, like the apostles, *sent* to continue the mission of Christ.
- We were reminded of the Five Marks, or characteristics, of that Mission:
 1. *Telling* the Good News;
 2. *Teaching* that Good News;
 3. being the Good News through *tending* to those in need;
 4. being the Good News through *transforming* situations of injustice and violence; and
 5. being the Good News through actively *treasuring* God's creation.
- We have particularly focused on the second Mark of Mission - that of teaching, baptising, and nurturing new believers - and the need for us to be more intentional about enacting this.
- Last Sunday we looked at the Mission Pathway, that enables people to walk on stepping stones across the metaphorical river from being unbelievers to becoming part of the next generation of parishioners here.

Currently at St John's

- I listed most, perhaps all, of what we are currently doing at St John's and where these activities fit into the seven stages of the pathway.
- What was highlighted with the first stage of *Potential Contacts* was that we are blessed to have many different groups and communities of people coming onto the parish site, and benefiting from our facilities:
 - our Kindergarten community;
 - the community meals; and
 - the community service groups.
- These people, and others, are all potential contacts, so that half the work of being able to make direct contact with them is already done.
- All we need to do is make some intentional effort to connect with, and relate to them.
- We saw that we are not really geared up with activities for the second, third, and fourth stages - that is the *In Touch*, the *Belonging*, and the *Embracing the Gospel* stages.
- We do have an annual Lent course and the weekly Focus on Faith and Friendship Group that meets some of the needs for people at stage 5, which is *Following Jesus*.
- We do have plenty of opportunities for people at stage 6, *Serving In Ministry*.
- And we are very limited at catering for, and mentoring, for those at stage 7, *Leading Ministry*.
- So when we look at our overall placement of stepping stones, it appears that there are quite a few missing, and the ones we have in place are not necessarily in alignment with each other.
- Put simply, we do not have all the stepping stones in place to enable unbelievers to be taught, baptised, and nurtured to become the next generation of parishioners.
- This is typical of many parishes: some have been attending to this for a while, some - like us - are only starting to recognise it now, while others still assume that what was working two generations ago still applies.

Who needs to be missional?

- Now just in case any of us are tempted to think: But that's *your* job, Father John! - actually, no it isn't.
- It's *our* work.
- We are sent, by Jesus, to continue his mission, and we are therefore to be, *together*, an apostolic and missional community.
- And my experience has been that when *I*, as a priest, share any aspect of my faith with someone who isn't a Christian, there is often a dismissive attitude of 'Well, you would say that, since you are the professional - it's your work, but I'm not a religious person.'
- I'm not referring here to my pastoral ministry, but to non-pastoral encounters.
- Whereas when a parishioner shares an aspect of their faith, the other person can't dismiss it in the same way.
- Of course they might dismiss it for other reasons - or they might actually be interested.
- Part of my role as the priest in charge of the parish is to help direct, teach and resource our church community's work of mission.

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Mission Focus Group

- So returning to the stepping stones that we need to establish to enact the second Mark of Mission, the first question that the parish's Mission Action Team engaged with was which group of people do we want to focus on to start with.
- Just as Jesus focused his efforts on calling and sending a group of mainly Galilean Jews rather than anyone else, in the same way we need to look at who we want to be intentionally missional towards - which group do we want to reach out to and connect with, and share the blessings of our faith relationship with God with?
- After prayerful consideration it became quite clear that the community who we would benefit most in coming alongside is our very own kindergarten.
- After all, previous generations of parishioners had established St John's Kindergarten for the benefit of both parish families and families from the wider community.
- And while the Education Department eventually required kindergartens to be regulated and run by professionals, our Kindergarten's constitution specifies that the parish priest is the chair or president of the Committee of Management, and that some parishioners are also involved in overseeing our kindergarten.
- Furthermore, for most of the families that attend our Kindergarten, the staff there are the face of St John's - so it makes sense for our church community to redevelop our relationship with our kindergarten community.

Mission Action Plan

- I invite you to look at our Mission Action Plan for the next few years, in **Appendix 1** below.
- It starts with a statement for St John's that we have a vision of *Enabling the growth of God's Kingdom in Croydon through intentional discipleship that serves both St John's and the wider community.*
- Intentional discipleship simply means that we will purposefully enact the second Mark of Mission of making and growing disciples, and growing as disciples ourselves.

- The second statement reminds us that our mission is of course not just about discipleship and not just about our kindergarten, but is more broadly to *Facilitate making God's Kingdom tangible and relevant to all who come to the parish site.*
- Just as we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, so we participate with God to strive to make that a felt reality both for ourselves, and for everyone else who comes to this place.

- The third statement describes some of the things we particularly value here at St John's:
 - *Belonging through fellowship and service;*
 - *enacting Jesus' teaching;*
 - *practising good liturgy.*
- Of course what is presented here can be adjusted; nevertheless they seem to effectively describe what is most important to us as a faith community.

- We currently have only two goals in our Mission Action Plan.
- This might seem quite *unambitious*, until we realise that while the previous Plan had ten goals, none were actually achieved.
- Many parishes have had the same experience with their first Mission Action Plan, so we have all learnt from that, and know that it is better to concentrate our efforts on fewer goals.
- After we had determined these goals - enacting a more family-oriented church, and intentionally connecting with parents - we realised that these were very similar to two of the goals of our previous Action Plan.
- Once we have made progress with achieving these goals we can start looking at the next actions that will help us fulfil the second Mark of Mission.
- So I invite you to look at **Appendix 2** below, to refer to the seven stages, and the kind of actions that we can explore undertaking.
- Let's work through each of the stages again, in turn:

Stage 1 - Potential Contact

- The *Potential Contact* stage is focused on those people who are total strangers to us - we don't know them by name and we don't have their contact details.
- We want to let them know that our church community exists, and that we are interested in something that might interest them.
- The strategies we have figured out so far are listed as:
 - discern and act on appropriate ways of connecting with kindergarten parents;
 - meeting with parents over coffee; and
 - facilitate parishioners actively engaging with and supporting Kinder community activities.

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- We aren't limited to this list, so that if there is anything you can think of that might help us to connect with where they are in their felt needs as kindergarten parents, then please let us know.
- There are some opportunities coming up, which are in the notices:
 - parishioners are invited to team up and participate in the Kindergarten Trivia Night on Saturday 10 September; and
 - we are trying to plan with the kinder staff a Blessing of the Pets event on Saturday 8 October that would appeal to the families.

Stage 2 - In Touch

- The *In Touch* stage is focused on those people who know at least one person in the church, and who in turn knows them.
- Some of the strategies we reckon are needed here are:
 - create child-parent space in church;
 - install nappy-change facilities;
 - update website and advertise; and
 - initiate family services.
- We've made a start, but again, we are open to further suggestions that build on the initial contact of Stage 1.
- Most of the strategies listed so far are very church-centric, so we will need to balance them with strategies that are not dependent on our sacred space, and not dependent on Sunday mornings.

Stage 3 - Belonging

- Although the third and subsequent stages do not yet have goals determined for them, it is important that we understand the kind of strategies that we are expecting to initiate.
- So the third *Belonging* stage is focused on those people who know several people in the church and are a regular part of a church group.
- The strategy here is to identify and establish appropriate group activities for parents, with or without their children.
- Examples are Mainly Music, and its off-shoot Mainly Play.
- These are weekly programmes run by a team of parishioners - who don't need to be musicians, because the music that is played is recorded music!

Stage 4 - Embracing The Gospel

- The fourth stage of *Embracing The Gospel* describes people who are interested in knowing about Jesus.
- The strategy for this is to run a course such as the Alpha course, or an equivalent.
- That would be best achieved through running the course for ourselves first - as inreach, and then the team of parishioners gearing up to do it regularly as part of our outreach.

Stage 5 - Following Jesus

- The fifth stage of *Following Jesus* describes people who are in a process of learning, obeying and growing in faith - which hopefully includes all of us here.
- This would require us to extend our Lent course groups to continuing beyond Lent, and to effectively duplicate our existing Saturday morning Focus on Faith and Friendship Group.
- Such groups, sometimes known as cell groups or life groups, have proven to be one of the most effective ways for Christians to develop and mature in their faith.

Stage 6 - Serving In Ministry

- The sixth stage is *Serving In Ministry*, and describes people who have identified gifts, skills and ministry, and are serving others in Jesus' name.
- While there are currently opportunities for this, it is important to recognise that in order to achieve the goals of the Mission Action Plan, I have effectively been listing new and different opportunities for serving in ministry, connected directly with the second Mark of Mission.
- To enable us to teach, baptise and nurture new believers is a ministry of service in itself.

Stage 7 - Leading Ministry

- The final stage of *Leading Ministry* describes people who take up leadership roles.
- Again, there will be opportunities for parishioners to exercise leadership with the current and future mission action goals.

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Conclusion

- Although this brings our sermon series on our Mission Action Plan to an end, I intend to refer back to this regularly in the coming weeks and months.
- I haven't spoken to today's readings, so I'll end by pointing out that they all address our faith relationship with God, especially when it is not rightly aligned.
- Nevertheless, Psalm 107 addresses the call for us to make a missional path for those who are in need of knowing God.
- Reading again from some of those verses:
*Some went astray in the wilderness and in the desert:
and found no path to an inhabited city;
They were hungry and thirsty:
and their heart fainted within them. (Psalm 107.4-5)*
- This can describe those people in the wider community who don't yet have the benefit of knowing Jesus.
- The Psalm says that *they cried to the Lord in their distress (v6)* - and even when they don't knowingly cry to the Lord, we know that our Lord hears their cries of distress.
- It continues:
*He led them by the right path:
till they came to an inhabited city.
Let them thank the Lord for his goodness:
For he satisfies the thirsty:
and fills the hungry with good things. (Psalm 107.7-9)*
- The pathway for mission can be this right path, and our community can be the inhabited city where newcomers find welcome and blessing.
- We pray that we may be encouraged and enabled to work with the Lord, establishing a path for newcomers, and being the community that our Lord aspires us to be.

APPENDIX 1

St John the Divine - Mission Action Plan: 2022-2025

Produced by St John's Mission Action Team, as part of the Diocesan Parish Renewal Program, and adopted by the Parish Council 20/3/2022

Parish Vision Enabling the growth of God's Kingdom in Croydon through intentional discipleship that serves both St John's and the wider community.

Parish Mission Facilitate making God's Kingdom tangible and relevant to all who come to the parish site.

Parish Values Belonging through fellowship and service; enacting Jesus' teaching; practising good liturgy.

Strategy Plan

Goal #1: Family-oriented church

Outcome: Help families who are in touch with the church community to be able to belong

Strategies:

- create child-parent space in church
- install nappy-change facilities
- update website and advertise
- initiate family services

Goal #2: Connect with parents (particularly Kindergarten parents)

Outcome: Help potential contacts become in touch with the church community

Strategies:

- discern and act on appropriate ways of connecting with kindergarten parents
- meeting with parents over coffee
- facilitate parishioners actively engaging with and supporting Kinder community activities

All the strategies listed support the mission strategy of proactively connecting broadly with our own kindergarten community.

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APPENDIX 2

Stage	<i>Description of people at this stage & what they need</i>	<i>Aim of activity at this stage</i>	<i>Planned activities for our parish (the stepping stones we plan to put in place to enable parents of young children to move from not knowing God to being disciples of Jesus)</i>
#1 Potential Contact	People we don't know & who know no one in the church. They need someone to make contact with them.	Let people know we have something to offer. Encourage people to make initial contact with us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discern and act on appropriate ways of connecting with kindergarten parents - meeting with parents over coffee - facilitate parishioners actively engaging with and supporting Kinder community activities
#2 In Touch	People who know at least one person in the church. They need an attractive group in which to belong.	Encourage people we know to become regular participants in a program or group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - create child-parent space in church - install nappy-change facilities - update website and advertise - initiate family services - further discernment is needed
#3 Belonging	Know several people and are a regular part of a church group. They need an opportunity to find out more about Christian faith and a reason to consider commitment.	Cultivate relationships between believers and people who participate in a program or group. Share spiritual life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify & establish appropriate group activities for parents/ children, eg Mainly Music or Mainly Play
#4 Embracing The Gospel	Interested in knowing about Jesus. They need to hear the gospel and establish a relationship with God.	Create an environment where people can explore the gospel in a meaningful way. Ensure there are opportunities for people to make a response to the claims of Jesus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - run regular courses, such as the Alpha Course
#5 Following Jesus	In a process of learning, obeying & growing in faith. They need teaching, encouragement & accountability to support Christian life.	Teach, encourage & share accountability with people as they shape their life to be followers of Jesus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish cell groups/life groups
#6 Serving In Ministry	Have identified gifts, skills & ministry, & are serving others in Jesus' name. They need opportunities & training to develop gifts.	Encourage & equip all people to exercise their gifts & talents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - serving in the activities listed under stages #1 to #5
#7 Leading Ministry	Take up a leadership role. They need leadership mentoring.	Train & encourage people to be leaders in the church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership training