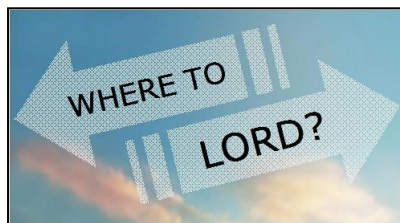


A Plan for Growth

Guidelines and suggestions to help churches prepare their own 'Plan for Growth' document



The Orpington and Chislehurst Circuit, its churches and its members have been considering the ways in which the ministry and mission of both the circuit and each church should develop. Each church was asked to form its own impact group or steering group. Each member was asked to prayerfully consider the direction that God was calling themselves and their church towards. The circuit has employed a Deacon from September 2017 to help churches develop their mission projects. It is now time for churches to formulate their Plan for Growth. The Circuit Strategy Group has produced this document to help churches draw up this plan.

The Overall Aim

In a word the aim of all of us and of all our activities in the Impact groups should continue to be MISSION. (Some churches may not have an impact group as such but nonetheless should be sharing this aim. They too will be asked to produce a Plan for Growth.)

Sharing

Of course it will be necessary for the groups to share their thinking, to improve and adapt their plans with as many members and adherents of their church as possible. At the very least it will need to be endorsed by their church council.

The strategy group feel that churches would benefit a great deal by working closely with another church for some or all of its plan. This may be a neighbour, another Methodist church or as part of the local

ecumenical set up.

Sharing ideas and resources may well be a key factor in gaining success. Also, the strategy group believe that sharing ideas between impact groups and between our churches is also likely to be beneficial. We shall certainly be holding more meetings for impact group leaders as 2017 unfolds.

Background

The Plan for Growth should contain a brief summary of where matters stand in the church at the present time. We suggest that the following headings may help:

- ◆ Basics – Current numbers of members and average attendance; Your financial situation; The state of your buildings; and how your church communicates with the world.
- ◆ Existing mission projects, noting separately any started within the last two years.
- ◆ Existing church ministries.
- ◆ Church discipleship.
- ◆ Your vision statement and/or mission statement, in a couple of sentences.

Achievable Goals

Next should be some well thought out goals, which will need to be obtainable within the resources of the church in respect of money, time, and commitment. Each goal should state what it is precisely that you wish to achieve; the reason for it; who will be involved; and how you will set about achieving it. Each goal should be given a projected date of completion.

Here are some possibilities that emerged for a 'brainstorm' in the strategy group. We are sure you will think of better ones!

- ◆ A Strategy for your church
- ◆ Linking with another church or possibly churches.
- ◆ Mission, mission, mission.
- ◆ Advertise, advertise, advertise.
- ◆ Using social media – Facebook, Twitter etc. to tell people what you are doing an inviting new groups of people, e.g. the under 30s, at a time that suits them.
- ◆ Evidence that your church council, church members and church adherents, know what is going on and largely support it.
- ◆ Evidence of plans being reviewed , modified by lessons learned and trying again in a different way, where necessary.
- ◆ New people doing new things e.g.
 - Coffee mornings; Tea parties; Special suppers
 - Cinema clubs; Video sessions; Speakers
 - Receiving invitations to church specials – Harvest ; Christmas
 - New study groups aimed at different age groups
 - Alpha groups and similar
 - Contacts with and invitations to, the users of your building
 - Focus on young people who use your premises...and their parents
 - After school clubs, nursery groups, holiday activities
 - Contact with community organisations
- ◆ New ways of doing live music
- ◆ New styles of worship aimed at new people.
- ◆ Focus on commuters or young Mums or.....
- ◆ Involving new people in church activities ,e.g. Helping with Whitechapel mission or the church Guide group or....
- ◆ IT Training workshops

How are we are doing?

The plan should contain regular review dates for checking out progress, identifying snags and delays, and space to modify the plan in the light of

experience. It may be helpful to break each goal down into achievable chunks. So, for example, if you have the goal to involve some of those who use your church premises for other purposes the first check point might be to make face to face contact with, say, twenty of them by the end of next month. The second check point, perhaps, might be to have held at least one special activity which was attended by at least half of that group not more than two months later. The third, at a set time after that, to engage in a discussion with, say, five of them, about the spiritual activities of the church and how they might join in.

And so on.

How did we do?

The plan should commit to full review of each project as it reaches fulfilment with identification and recording of the lessons learned. This will greatly benefit new plans as they are formulated. Thus a cycle will be established :- Plan – Action - Review - Plan – Action – Review and round again...and again.

Support

The Strategy group will try to assist wherever possible. Attached as an annex to this document is a paper from Roger May with some thoughts on change that you may find helpful.

Maureen Spinks our new Deacon will start here in the autumn of 2017. Our initial meeting with her made it clear that she is a person with great ideas, plenty of energy and lots of experience. She is keen to help churches develop projects and to help initiate them, especially those which make links with local communities and draw in new people. She may also help the training those of us who may be delivering the projects.

Annex

Change

'I honestly believe that the promise of Christ that the church will not fail is one we can trust'.

In 2001 Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, led a seminar in Sydney, Australia, at which he explored what we can learn from the Desert Fathers, those holy men of ancient times who lived as hermits in the wilderness of Egypt and beyond. One of the questions he was asked after his talks was 'Where is the church going?'. The quotation above is the first sentence of his reply. The question itself carries the sense that the church is in trouble. Many would agree with that, even more so now as we enter 2018 than was true nearly twenty years ago. The decline in church attendance across the nation is alarming, not least right here in our own circuit. As membership and attendance falls so does our income and what one might call the number of 'hands on deck' – people able and willing to give time to church affairs. Almost all of the churches in this circuit are dependent upon the income from lettings to outside agencies to meet their costs. The question 'Where is the church going?' could reasonably be answered 'downhill', and, even, 'downhill fast'. The key factor in all of this, and it is always true, is that progress means change. I repeat, *progress means change*.

A little further on in his reply Rowan Williams said, 'The parish system works up to a point, but it is one among several ways of being a church. For many people, in addition to parochial loyalties, there are cross parochial ties and networks that feed and sustain them'. If we substitute Methodist church for parish we can say the same. Rowan Williams then

continues we find 'What needs to happen within the parish structure and what needs to happen around all the non-parish networks, is *a re-visioning* of the church (my italics). Further on he continues 'I think we need to break free a bit, recognizing that, in addition to the sacraments, we meet for other kinds of togetherness, in study and prayer – which means challenging any model based on Sunday patterns alone'. A moments thought will remind us that Methodism has always done that – we meet in house groups, study groups, prayer groups, for social events, service activities in the community and so on. But the fact is that even these activities are in decline and I think that the main points of Rowan Williams are true. They are :

- Central to our activities above all are the sacraments, worship, study and prayer
- Sunday worship is only one of the things that it is an important stream of our activities
- That we need new vision and new ways of reaching out to others

This last would be progress – and *progress means change*.

So, the rest of this article is about change and let me start by saying what *change does NOT mean*:

- ◆ Change does not mean abandoning our core values and Christian beliefs
- ◆ Change does not mean that the hard pressed Christian activists have to do even more
- ◆ Change does not mean that we stop catering for those who are most helped by traditional forms of liturgy, hymns and worship

But change DOES mean:

- That we go through a period of hard thinking, urgent prayer, and wide discussion
- That we may have times when we feel anxious about the outcomes
- That we may find it painful realising that we may have to let go of certain activities and ways of doing things that have served us well in the past
- That we must be prepared to experiment, try things out and sometimes try again and again to get things right
- That it may take us quite a while to get used to new ways of doing things and to see results
- That some people find change very difficult and may even be obstructive

So how do we cope with those things?

It is likely that each church will cope in its own way, some better than others, some more quickly than others. But one thing is clear. Cope we must. There is no substitute. Do not be misled. The matter of church decline is serious.

The time for action is now. Improvements of our premises, desirable as they are, will, at best, only be a small part of the answer. We need new *people*.

Each of our church councils needs to get behind the formation and work of their Impact Group urgently and wholeheartedly. Each of us, church council member or not, needs to contribute by thought, prayer, discussion and preparation for change. Impact Groups will have to be active and daring, prepared to review, evaluate and learn as they go. We,

all of us, will need to try to accept difference and try to foster, not hinder, new initiatives. At the same time, we must all be sensitive to the views of those who find change difficult and accommodate them where we can. General Eisenhower used to measure the likely success of the proposals for particular actions by the Allies by asking the question 'Will it get us any nearer to Berlin?'. Our Berlin is nothing short of survival – not necessarily measured by the survival of our buildings but the survival of efforts to bring new people to Christ through the practice of our Methodism.

Will we succeed?

Rowan Williams certainly thought so. Here is what he said after his initial statement that he strongly believes that the promise of Christ that the church will not fail is one we can trust. 'This is for the simple reason that the church is above all the community of those whom Jesus calls to receive the Spirit and to share the relation he has to the Father, to the eternal source. Because Jesus doesn't stop issuing that invitation, the church doesn't stop existing'. 'That', he continued, 'is the bottom line'. What he did not say, but well might have done, is that to enable that to happen every one of us must do their bit.

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Quotations in this article are taken from 'Silence and Honey Cakes' - The wisdom of the desert, by Rowan Williams published by Lion books, ISBN 978 0 7459 5170 6.

