

Decade of Mission

The movers speech for the motion of the Decade of Mission, Saturday 6 September 2014.

Mr President, members of Synod. I am Graham Miller from the parish of St Chads, and was one of your elected members of General Synod.

This motion derives from a General Synod motion to declare the decade commencing from Advent 2015 a Decade of Mission. This is intended to include mission in its broadest with recognition for all aspects of our commitment to mission.

In agreeing this motion General Synod approved the formation of a three tikanga working group to help encourage and resource this endeavour. Ven Carole Hughes, Phil Clark of Church Army and myself are members of this house who are part of the working group and we are chaired by Bishop Richard Eleanor. We had our First meeting post General Synod on Wednesday.

The group which promoted the motion to General Synod included in the material presented to General Synod 7 recommended missional targets.

- Overhaul Church priorities, structures, committees and leadership time allocation at all levels to reflect the missionary zeal of the early church and our expression of the 5 part Mission statement in this generation.
- Establish a Commissioner for Mission Mobilisation within our Province with sufficient resources to act.
- Build Mission Communities at all levels of the Province, cross-parish, cross-Tikanga, cross-culturally, ecumenically and with churches overseas.
- Target “people of influence” in the church for mission experiences, mission (re-) training, and mission alignment.
- Build capacity (personnel, expertise and resources) at all levels of the Province for mission engagement for evangelism, discipleship, missiology training, social action and transformation, and eco-missions.
- Invite missionaries from overseas to come, short term or long term, to influence our region for mission engagement.
- Grow the Church in Aotearoa/New Zealand to add 100,000 new disciples in 10 years. \

These are bold and really challenging tasks. My inclusion of the target of 35000 is simply a population apportionment of 100,000. But I really like the idea presented by such a challenge because it is often only by recognizing the practical implications of such a challenge that we start addressing some of the issues and attitudes that may impede mission.

In terms of absolute numbers it could be seen as relatively easy - if for instance every current Anglican in this diocese, and I'm assuming from the statistics there are 10000 of us in church on Sunday, introduced a new person into our church once every three years, then at the end of 9 years there are 80,000 of us!

But realistically if this were to happen we will literally have to find new ways of being church. Ways that engage a whole generation of unchurched people.

I believe the message of salvation through Jesus is unchanging, but the way people engage with Jesus and the Church is evolving, and we need to be really in tune with God to see the new possibilities God wants to release amongst us.

We could say this is fundamental to our calling as Christians. Jesus lived to deliver grace love and healing to a whole generation, and then through the Holy Spirit empowered that generation to do the same. I love the challenge presented to us of the early church in the latter part of Acts 4. A church of confidence, spiritual power, grace and sacrifice who had no needy people amongst them, and growing it seems in numbers and grace every day.

A compelling church, a committed church, a serving church. A growing church.

I am also mightily challenged by the reality that my church, my parish, is not like that. There are moments, but are we missing something. Am I missing something?

I am very aware one cannot transform individual people, our Church, much less our society, by synod motions. That early church demonstrated enormous evidence of God at work including the miraculous.

I guess the challenge for me is; - what is the real evidence of God working in my life, and how transforming is it of the places where I live, work and worship? In simple terms - what is the evidence of God's working in our lives?

How can we as the church be radically transforming communities?

Some may be uncomfortable with the preamble that suggests we are no longer light and salt to the world. I know there are many if not all of us who do show Christ's presence and love in our families, communities and churches - but the point being made is how are we, as a Church. Does anyone really take notice of us anymore? Does Mayor Brown have our Bishops as his first port of call if he wants to talk about housing needs? Are our Bishops on John Keys fast dial? How much influence do we really have on social policy and practice? In the reality TV cooking programmes participants learn that it's not enough to just enough to put a pinch of salt - there needs to be enough seasoning to change the flavour of the meal. My question is how much does our church now impact on the flavour of our Nation.

So how do we go about transforming our Nation?

What really is needed? - this clearly has a contextual element as each of us as individuals and each ministry unit has a unique place in God's Realm, and what applies to one will not necessarily apply to another but I believe there are some fundamentals.

First and foremost is prayer.

Prayer!!! Without prayer we can do nothing. It has been said that God does nothing other than that wrought by prayer. The whole idea of more committed prayer

challenges me - but I see no option. How much intentional prayer can I do, how much intentional prayer does my parish do. I am aware of many faithful folk who pray passionately and regularly, but I think that many of us struggle in this, but if any one aspect of our work is critical it is prayer. We need to make intentional prayer for our Nation a total priority.

And what is our prayer? - mine is that God will give me a passion for those who need to know a touch from God, and a willingness, an openness, a readiness respond to their needs whether practical or spiritual. It is astonishing how people will allow you to pray with them when you ask -it's true that asking is to risk rejection and none of us find that at all easy but it is astonishing how people can let you into precious parts of their lives just by the invitation to prayer. An action like that can become the beginning of a journey for that person – a journey you may have the privilege of sharing.

Another key issue I really want to address show can we as a church remove barriers to others become part of our church?

How do we create space for new believers – what might church look like for we have a bunch of brand new believers - can your church continue as it is?

That is why I have suggested we need ideas to help us to change to the needs of a totally new generation of believers. We still have a huge level of resources tied up in being church in our very traditional way. We have inherited a very English style of being church from our settler forebears. Does that need to change?

For some, that may be easy to answer but I suspect that for many we will need help along the way. That is why this motion does ask the new mission and ministry council to help guide us, particularly in looking at the structural impediments to mission. I love the idea of “indaba” our bishops shared with us in their charge – to me the sharing of Mission starts with the sharing of dreams, lives, and stories. We need to start owning each other’s dreams. We need to create places to release the prophetic amongst us. This must be done between ministry units and with our tikanga partners.

In finishing I want to recount a story from around 1989. The 1988 General Synod had decided we needed a Commission for Evangelism, and the first meeting of Representatives from each Diocese took place in Wellington. We were then discussing the impediments to evangelism and mission in the church. Archbishop Brian Davis was in attendance but after quite some time hadn't contributed greatly to the conversation. He then suggested our church really lacked one key ingredient and that was passion - passion for Jesus, passion for the Word, and more particularly passion for the lost.

Perhaps he is right - should our prayer be that God would make us passionate about those things he is passionate about. Perhaps we might then see God's transforming power working mightily in our church

This motion is really challenging, but I for one are willing to engage in this. I urge you to join me.

I have great pleasure in moving this motion.