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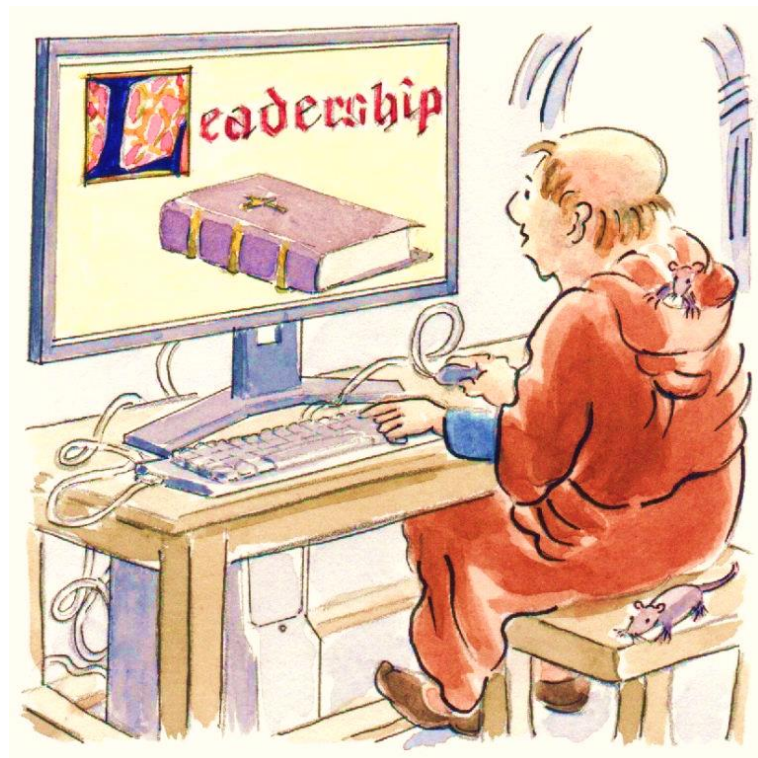
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What's the vision?

A day to look ahead for St Paul's PCC



St Paul's Church, Letchworth – 14th January 2023

If you prefer these notes on screen, you may access the pdf at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News> and then the item for today's date.

Parable

We start today with a story

What did the story say to you about facing a new situation **together**?

Detail v perspective

- Both are needed but we spend more time on the first.
- Most people have a strong bias to detail because they feel they can cope with it.
- It is instructive to read the openings of all four Gospels.

Our church's story in all three tenses

The idea of story-telling may resonate with most people more than the idea of business plans. Our use of imagery and language is important.

1 The story of the past

We need to remember what God has been doing with us over the years.
Learning from the past is very different from living in the past.
The causes of some present difficulties may lie far in the past.
We need to see patterns and trends.

2 The story of the present

We need an honest analysis of present strengths and weaknesses.
It may help to have an outside perspective as in Revelation 2 and 3.
It can be instructive to discover where leadership lies in any church.

3 The story of the future

This is founded on both past and present.
The story is sure to be one of change.
The story also needs to be recognised as one of risk.

IDEAS TO CONSIDER

- *The church time line – its recent history*
- *The personal time line – your story as a follower of Jesus Christ*
- *The community time chart – Letchworth and its needs*

1: Purpose for the future

Or 'Why are we here?'

What is the 'why' of any church?

The 'Why?' question is the key to the future, to avoid doing the wrong things really well!

1 Discipleship

A shift of thinking from Attendance, to Membership, to Discipleship.

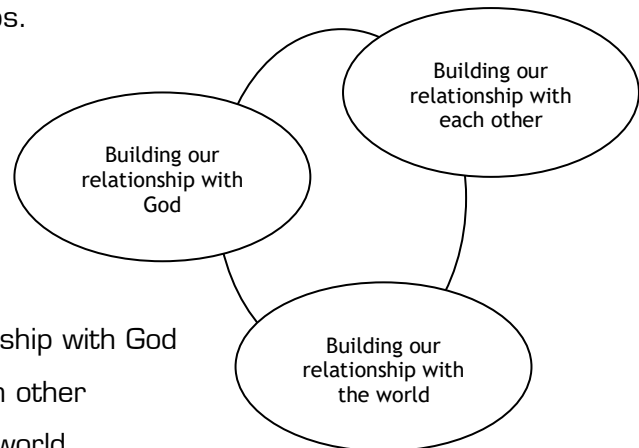
So our purpose is to grow disciples: those who both *follow* and *learn from* Jesus Christ. These are two powerful verbs.

See Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-17.

2 Growing in relationship

To avoid any danger with using 'doing' words or even static 'being' words, try the idea of growing in relationships (or the idea of 'growing deeper' in each case).

- We are to grow in our relationship with God
- ... in our relationship with each other
- ... in our relationship with the world



See Mark 3:13-19. Always start an answer to a 'Why?' question, 'So that.....'

Our purpose

The idea of a purpose or strap-line is fine. The way that most churches use one is certainly not. Here are six points to save you going the same way as others.

1 Reality

It needs to be true to church life or it is meaningless.

2 Challenge

A purpose statement must never be bland.

3 Ownership

It is of little use if it is in everyone's filing cabinet.

4 Validity

It should stand the test of the biblical model for church purpose (above).

5 Meaning

Clarify its meaning word by word ('vibrant', 'light of Jesus', 'love of Jesus').

And the one where almost everyone falls down:

6 Application

Apply it to every department of church life: crèche, PCC, Sundays.

Some people prefer to DRAW the purpose.

For more on this page see Training Notes TN122, *What's the point of church?* and TN48, *Let's get purpose statements right*, in the Resources section of my website.

2: Principles for the future

Or 'What matters most to us as we fulfil our purpose

This tells us something of who we are, what matters most to us, and how we go about things. It may be helpful to see three levels. At each consider both **IS** and **MIGHT BE**.

Non-negotiable foundations

These are our foundations on which we build and matter most to us. They may be doctrinal in some way, but without them we would not be the church we know. But what might be the non-negotiables for St Paul's? One would be that we are Anglican.

Community principles

A list of approaches that tell us what matters most in how the churches live and work. They will come from belief and lead to behaviour. What might we need to change in these from IS to MIGHT BE? Ideas to consider include

- formal or informal: a question of style
- open or closed: our welcome to outsiders
- risk or safety: how we handle failure
- tradition or innovation: thinking outside the box
- proactive or reactive: rush ahead or wait and see

Internal agreements

Any church will have these, even though they will not normally be in writing anywhere. Style of meetings, punctuality, dress code, and so on.

Read Training Notes TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*, TN74, *Understanding values*, and TN142, *Values create a culture*, in the Resources section of the website.

3: Prayer for the future

Or 'Where might God take us to?'

Read Mark 8:31-34.

Clarifying the meaning of 'vision' or 'prayer' or 'faith'

There is great confusion about this idea. It's what you are praying God will bring about.

- 1 **Vision is about destination**
It describes *a scene in the future* (or in eternity) and so is different from purpose.
- 2 **This includes changed lives**
Lack of vision means you are seeking to keep the show on the road. With a vision you are seeking to change the world. So a vision should speak of people changed.
- 3 **Visions are about ends not means**
On this basis you should not have your main vision as 'to complete a building'. This is a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- 4 **Vision is not the same as visionary**
Some people wake up each morning with five new visions. What is needed is one vision that the whole church is working towards.
- 5 **Visions are about what God might do**
The purpose is about our work, the vision is of what we have the faith to pray God might do if we are faithful to our purpose. *Visions must be for his glory.*
- 6 **Vision goes with leadership**
The role of the leadership (and hence PCC) is to hold the church to its agreed vision, even when the going gets tough. *People may be out of comfort zones.*

"Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion."

Ideas to help you get there

- **External encourager**
Someone or a church team who have seen God work this way before.
- **Brainstorming**
A group allowed to lose restraints (such as finance) and dream dreams.
- **'I have a dream' input**
Someone outside the group produces a logical but challenging scenario in the future, if the church works fully to its purpose.
- **Reverse visioning**
Go into the future and look back after excellent outcomes. What has happened?
- **Emigrate to Australia**
We shall try this one shortly.

See Training Notes TN32, *What do you mean by vision?*, and TN103, *How to encourage creative thinking*, in the Resources section of the website.

4: Plan for the future

Or how are we going to get there?

The plan must be true to

- 1 Our agreed purpose – we must be true to our purpose
- 2 Our church principles – and where we might want to change it
- 3 Our prayers for the future – what follows now is our plan to work towards that

Three issues to consider for the plan

Annual aims

A small number of specific achievements for each year. Start with the first year.

A set of targets for each aim

These are specific steps to achieve each aim, typically with dates during the year in question. These need to be realistic and easily measurable so they can be checked.

An understanding of the cost of change

PEOPLE: The change needed in **attitude** to achieve each aim

PROGRAMME: The change needed in **activity** to achieve each aim

PCC: The change needed in **the Council** to achieve each aim

See Article A4, *Twelve questions to help you plan*, in the Resources section of the website. Also Article A24, *Mission-shaped Church Councils*, plus Training Notes TN12, *Twenty ideas to help people change* and TNB1, *Changing the scenery*.

Some questions about your website statements

You say on your home page:

We are a vibrant church in the heart of Letchworth who believe that Jesus loves and accepts everyone no exceptions.

Your 2021 annual report (on your website) states:

Our vision, and the calling we sense the Lord has placed on us 'To Show the Light and Love of Jesus for All' remains at the heart of all we do.

You put the statement 'To Show....' In bold print capitals on the back of your church magazine.

- 1 Which of these would you have been able to cite without looking them up?
- 2 Are these statements of purpose, of values or of vision? Why?
- 3 How well do they follow the principles in these notes? Would you want to change them in any way?

Points made in TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*

- 1 We are to give Jesus Christ absolute priority.
- 2 We are to seek the approval of God rather than other people.
- 3 We are to be vulnerable with each other.
- 4 We are to be clearly different in our behaviour.
- 5 We are to be radically different in our attitudes.

Website resources to support today's theme

Go to <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk> then the Resources section, and look out for Articles (A) and Training Notes (TN) among others as follows:

- A4 Twelve questions to help you plan
- A24 Mission-shaped Church Councils
- A35 Mapping your church
- A52 How to run a church vision day (based on these notes)

- TN8 Major decisions: a new approach
- TN12 Twenty ideas to help people change
- TN25 The radical values that Jesus taught
- TN32 What do you mean by vision?
- TN48 Let's get purpose statements right
- TN74 Understanding values
- TN91 An MOT for disciples of Jesus
- TN103 How to encourage creative thinking
- TN124 What's the point of church?
- TN133 Planning the next step
- TN142 Values create a culture