

Bishop Peter's talk – extended - at the Chichester Society gathering 23.01.16

Bishop Peter's brief

Bishop Martin has asked me to help parishes think about **mission strategy and strategic use of resources**. The importance of Mission Action Plans lies in the development of a shared vision of clergy and laypeople. *Anecdote and Evidence*, the 2014 report commissioned by the Church Commissioners, listed 'a clear mission and purpose' as one of the 'common ingredients strongly associated with growth' in churches of any size. Other factors include 'being intentional in prioritising growth', good leadership which can motivate, envision and innovate, being intentional in the chosen style of worship and in nurturing disciples, and actively engaging children and teenagers, where three quarters of churches which offer camps, conferences or retreats for young people report growth. (Walsingham here we come.) **Strategic use of resources** broadens out the vision beyond sources of income to thinking of others in the community who might be partners with us in social, cultural or historic concerns. We can use the Church Urban Fund poverty website or the C of E Research and Statistics Department's Parish Spotlight to gain more insight into our parish and test our knowledge and intuitions against the statistics.

Mission Action Planning

All parishes have Mission Action Plans. In my experience where they may fall down is in the detail of implementation – where SMART goals are needed (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed). Who is going to do the work and how are we going to review progress?

The Visitation

All of us bishops here share in Bishop Martin's episcopate and so I have been able to read the presentments made to him by the clergy in his Visitation. I am struck by how hopeful and well motivated the priests and deacons are with plenty of ideas and possibilities. I am also struck by great contrasts in the parishes: affluent/socially deprived; rural/urban/suburban/'a retirement hot-spot'; large/small congregation. For some there is a sense of struggle in a well-meaning environment. Others mention a priest-centred culture which takes a long time to change. So what works and what is proposed varies greatly.

Forward from the Visitation

These presentments are about two years old. To what extent have these presentments been able to be followed up? Has someone been able to ask the parish priest or the PCC – how is X or Y that you mentioned now progressing? Is Ministerial Development Review doing this for the clergy? There may be a modest role for me and others here in coming to parishes if invited to assist with this. The diocesan resources of the Church Growth Team are of course also available.

Growth

Many priests in our tradition have been in post for five or less years. Experience elsewhere is that growth may happen in a small spurt after the institution of a new priest and then, and perhaps more permanently, after a priest has been over five years in post. That growth of course is predicated on the work put in in the previous five years.

Faith-sharing

There is a lot of concern, rightly, about people lacking knowledge of the Bible and the faith, and about people being able to share their faith. This is a complex picture involving British reticence and the prevalent social attitude that religion is a private matter. A few think they have cracked it with e.g. an evangelism group, Baptism buddies, thriving enquirers groups. Not everyone can be articulate in the way clergy must be. Often what matters is to give people stories that they can tell about what they do: involvement in social action projects are an example. It should not be a surprise that when we assist the homeless, or help run a food or clothes bank that others are attracted (cf. Matthew 25. 31-46).

Sharing experience

There are specific requests for shared knowledge of: how useful courses or books have been e.g. 'Follow me', 'Pilgrim', 'Catholic Evangelism'; material for children's work; how skills in faith-sharing were developed; resources for youth worship. We have the Department of Apostolic Life to help us here. We may need to develop among ourselves ways of sharing experience and good practice. One of the effective ways towards growth is the sharing of knowledge of what works. There is often a modesty among growing churches in telling their story and we need to learn from them.

On message!

All this relates to the three strands of the diocesan strategy: growth in holiness and numbers, re-imagining ministry, and contributing to the common good.

Peter Wheatley

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