

Bishop's Charge to Synod: Greymouth 2009.....

It has been an interesting year; 150 years since the arrival and installation of the first Bishop of Nelson and I was surprised and thrilled at the enthusiasm generated by our celebration of those 150 years together with the city of Nelson.

On a personal level, Bishop John Pritchard – Bishop of Oxford – sat me down when he was out here and said, “Well Richard. You have celebrated 150 years pretty publicly; you have walked 1000 kms; you have moved house; you have waved your daughter goodbye as she headed overseas for two years; you have presided over a leadership conference; you have buried your dad and you’re only one third of the way through the year. What are you going to do for the rest of the year?” It was a bit of a wake-up call.



But something else happened around the same time that gave me an even greater ‘wake-up call.’ In my role as Bishop of Nelson I am one of the four permanent Trustees on the Cawthron Trust – the largest privately funded scientific research organisation in the country. It is based here in Nelson and employs around 150 staff. At our meeting a few months ago, the chairman of the Board of Directors presented their strategic plan to the Trustees. The Board of Directors is made up of some pretty high-powered business men and women – as is the Trust, but I was totally unprepared for the impact this strategic plan had upon me. It wasn’t the content itself – which painted an exciting future for Cawthron. It was the clarity of focus and of identity as well as the breadth of vision and I have absolutely no doubt they will achieve all the goals they have set for the institute for the next few years.

I sat in the meeting and read this strategic plan and experienced a deep ache for the church. Here was a secular organisation that is doing some great stuff in the world of scientific research, but who also have a crystal clear understanding of who they are, what they should be doing and where they want to be in five years time. The church by comparison has something that totally transcends that of Cawthron – or of any other company or organisation.

We have the keys to the Kingdom of God; we have the certainty of eternity; we have the hope of salvation; we have answers to the greatest questions of life – we have word of life; we have the promise of life in all its fullness; we have the author of life. We have Jesus. And yet to look at us you wouldn’t think so. We potter along week by week, year by year trying to be faithful and obedient in our ministry and our calling. And I experienced this ache for the church, but then an overwhelming determination to do something about it; to place a strategic plan before the Diocese that brings a clarity of focus to who **we** are and what **we**

are called to do and where **we** are going to put our energies for the next five years in the amazing mission that God has given us to as **His** church.

So here goes folks; a strategic Plan for the Diocese of Nelson that I hope will be enthusiastically discussed and adopted by this Synod as a blueprint of our life for the next five years. Although it has a huge part of me in it, it has been developed through prayer and discussion with the Bishop's team, with Standing Committee and also briefly by the Regional Deans. The layout is unashamedly stolen from Cawthron. Proverbs 16:3 encourages us to 'commit to the Lord whatever we do, and our plans will succeed.'

This plan is in three parts.

Part one lays the foundation for the strategic plan by clearly articulating why we exist as a Diocese and what we believe we are called to do and, as an outworking of that, our aims - which will be reflected in each parish and ministry unit within the Diocese. It then describes our core principles – those 'non-negotiables' that define us as the Diocese of Nelson. It also includes our values – key areas of focus and finally, the challenges that we face as the church in the community within which we exist. In many respects it is the most important part of the plan because it defines us and it unifies us and it also, in some sense, nails our colours to the mast.

Part two is the vision part. It outlines what we are calling our 'strategic priorities;' the five key areas that we believe we need to focus on as a Diocese over the next five years as we seek to realise our vision. Within each of these strategic priorities we have included our strategic intent – a general description of what we would like to see achieved in that area, and also the more specific Strategic Outcomes by which we can measure our progress.

Finally, Part three which is really the engine room of the plan and, as you will see, is still a work in progress. It gives the details as to how we might achieve our vision and our goals.

So: Part one.

A few weeks ago I was asked to speak at Promise Keepers on the theme of identity and as I prepared my talk I was confronted again with the two great existential questions that seem to govern the decisions we make and the way we view ourselves. Who am I (which is the question of identity) and what is the meaning of my life (which is the question of significance). And these are so similar to the two questions that form the heart of our vision and mission.

Why do we exist as a Diocese?

(It's the 'who are we' question of identity)

'The Diocese of Nelson exists to bring glory to God by developing and nurturing vibrant, Christ-centred, Anglican communities of faith in the top third of the South Island of New Zealand.'

It reinforces what we believe so strongly – that while the Diocese is the focus of unity the local church is the focus of mission and ministry.

And the question that reflects our mission:

What do we do?

'We build local communities of faith that radiate Christ through their worship; their fellowship; their service and their witness in such a way that lives are transformed. We minister with one another, in partnership as a diocese and regionally through deaneries.'

I love this statement. The first part of it speaks about our ministry but the second part about our 'oneness' in the outworking of this mission. We are not alone; we are here to support and encourage one another.

The strategic plan then expands this mission statement with a series of five aims that I sincerely hope and pray can be embraced by every single parish and ministry unity represented on this Synod.

The first aim of the Diocese is *'to glorify God through our worship that is both corporate and personal; culturally relevant and transcendent; self denying and life-giving; yet always biblical.'*

I hope that it is obvious why this comes first. The Westminster Catechism reminds us that the chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is the worship of the church and must be first in all we do – our worship that is both corporate and yet individual. I hope you'll spend some time reflecting on the other adjectives found in this aim.

Second aim is *'to preach and teach in such a way that lives are transformed and people are challenged and inspired in their commitment to discipleship.'*

The evangelical foundation of this Diocese means that we take the ministry of preaching and teaching seriously and I want to affirm that so strongly. But I want to us to think about what the consequence is of our emphasis on preaching and teaching. I believe that unless it leads to personal transformation and a deeper commitment to discipleship then it is simply a barren exercise. Strong words!

The third aim is *'to build authentic community.'*

We spent ages trying to tease this out, but in the end felt that it said all that needed to be said. Community is part of the very nature of who God is. Dr Gilbert Belezekian described God beautifully as 'a community of oneness.' And the building of a community of faith is one of the great meta-narratives of scripture. However there is also what Scott Peck calls 'pseudo-community' – playing at being community with little or no depth of relationship or mutual accountability. It is so far from the Apostle Paul's description of the church in 1 Corinthians 12:26 *'if one part suffers all the parts suffer and if one part is honoured then all the parts are glad.'* I want us to build authentic community.

Fourth aim is *'to be a missional church, reaching out beyond ourselves (both at home and overseas) with acts of loving service and proclamation that radiate our commitment to Jesus.'*

I don't think this needs any teasing out. I've spoken about it for two years now and I think its time to get beyond the talking and into the doing!

Final aim is *'to be a church of grace that embraces and values people of all ages and circumstances in the redeeming love of Christ.'*

This was a late edition but one that sat on my heart and wouldn't go away. It was reinforced after reading a book that Felicity Whitcombe gave me – that I know many others of you

have read - called 'No Perfect People Allowed' by John Burke. There is a sermon in that one aim but I'll reserve that for another time and just let it stand at this point.

I could probably stop there and say that if we only took this first, foundational part of the plan seriously – especially these five aims - and worked them out strategically within our parishes, we would see renewal.

But there's more:

The plan then lists five **Core Principles**. These are the non-negotiables that define our identity as a Diocese. They reflect our evangelical theology and also our missional passion.

Scripture.

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation as well as the rule and ultimate standard of our faith. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading and the Creeds of the Church.¹

Not much startlingly new in this passage!

The first sentence is resolution 11 from the Lambeth Conference of 1888 which is still affirmed by the Anglican Communion today. And the second sentence comes from the GAFCON conference held in the Middle East last year – with the addition of the reference to the Creeds of the Church. I hope that this is still something that we overwhelmingly affirm as a Diocese. It puts us out-of-step with the revisionist elements within the Anglican Communion but totally on board with the huge majority of orthodox Anglicans here and overseas. It confirms our determination to bring the authority of scripture to the table whenever issues of life and faith are being debated within the Church.

The Church.

We believe that the Church is the *'ekklesia'*² of God; a fellowship of baptised believers³ whose life together reflects the life of Christ, and is nurtured through the ministry of word and sacrament. It is authenticated and empowered through the Holy Spirit in both its 'being' and its 'doing' (i.e. its identity and its mission.) We exist by the grace of God to be a means of God's grace.

I believe in the Church!

I know it's not popular - and every poll tells us that while people are open to Jesus they are totally turned off by their perception of the Church. But I can't help it. I'm passionate about the Church because Jesus was – unless there is some other way of reading Ephesians 5:25-27. The Body of Christ is the vehicle through which Jesus continues his redeeming work in the world – a transformed community that he will use to facilitate community transformation!

¹ A combination of 'the Jerusalem declaration' from GAFCON in 2008 and resolution 11 of the Lambeth Conference of 1888.

² The 'gathering'.

³ 1 Corinthians 12:13

Human Dignity

We believe that when the Bible says that God so loved *the world* it means all people – people close to God and people far from God. As a result it is our responsibility to Love people as Christ did; recognising that God’s plan is for all things on heaven and earth to be drawn together under the authority of Christ.⁴

If I can refer back to my Synod Sermon – this is the ‘agape’ dimension of our life as a Church. It’s very easy to love those who are loveable. But Jesus challenges us to something far more; a Church of open doors and open hands.

The Redeeming love of God

We believe that the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the ultimate expression of God’s redeeming love and the source of our new life.

Again, in the face of a militant revisionist lobby within the church this Diocese affirms this central doctrine of the Church, and despite the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church’s statement that it is heretical, we believe that this is also intensely personal.

The Transforming Mission of God

We believe in, and are committed to, the ongoing work of God in bringing all creation to its intended goal, and especially in the transformative power of Christ’s resurrection as the first fruit of this new creation.⁵

It is a simple way of affirming that our mission as a church derives its motivation and validation from the ‘*Missio Dei*’ – the Mission of God. As someone cleverly phrased it: It’s not that the church of God has a mission, but rather that the God of mission has a church!’

Following these Core Principles we have a series of value statements. These are not deeply profound but simply list some of the attributes that I hope we will strive for within our individual parishes and ministry units if we don’t already. They provide a focus for our planning and dreaming. I’m not going to expand them – they are self-explanatory – and in some cases simply repeat what has already been stated somewhere else. But they are a key part of helping us define who we are and so have been included in this first part of our Strategic Plan.

We value:

- The challenge of the great commission, knowing that people far from God matter to God and therefore should matter to us.
- Relationships. People join the church for a variety of different reasons, but they stay for only one – relationship.
- Authentic worship that inspires the believer and attracts those who are yet to believe.
- Anointed teaching as the primary catalyst for transformation in the lives of individuals and in the church.

⁴ Ephesians 1:10

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20

- Love, acceptance, honesty and forgiveness as the dominant features of authentic Christian Community.
- Holiness, as the ideal form of life for God's people.
- Christian leadership that effectively identifies, nurtures and releases the individual gifts of each and every member.
- Scripture as the primary authority and guide for a Christ-centred life.
- The renewing and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
- Being Anglican and being an evangelical diocese within the Anglican Church.

Everything I have presented so far presents a detailed picture of who we are and what we believe we have been called to be and do. I hope that it brings clarity to our understanding, but also a focus to the ministry of the church which, as I said at the very beginning, often appears to be lacking in direction. I also hope that with the clarity comes excitement. The last section of Part One is critical to our planning because it lists some of the challenges that we face in the outworking of our vision and mission. It reveals the 'elephants' visible and invisible!

1. A changing society:

The Society and culture within which we live is changing more rapidly than ever. The explosion of information and communication technology has led to the growth of a global village which has directly affected the rate of change in our society. In the first half of the twentieth century change occurred with each new generation. That change now occurs every 5 to ten years! Which leaves us gasping for breath and wondering how to respond. By the time we have found a way forward contemporary culture has reinvented itself.

Some of the features and trends that impact us as Church are:

- The rise of individualism and the growth of a multi-choice society. Christianity is now one choice amongst many other choices. Within this is the growth of 'tribalism' – the development of people groups with common values based on their common choices.
 - The fascination with 'spirituality' but a corresponding perception of the church's irrelevancy.
 - Generational separation and increasing sense of isolation.
 - Influence of consumerism on the development of community
- An ageing society - In all regions of the Diocese the percentage of those 65 and over is higher than the New Zealand average which begs the question as to how we might respond pastorally and what patterns of worship are relevant and how this impacts our desire to reach a new generation.

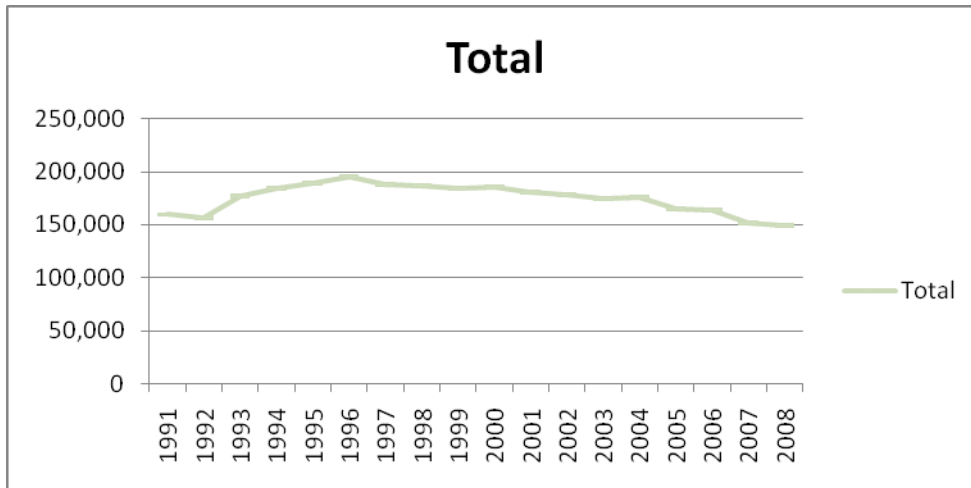
I know that none of this is new to anyone here – we live with the change daily. The challenge is how best to respond without watering down the counter-cultural message of the Gospel; how can we be culturally relevant while maintaining a commitment to holiness.

2. Christianity in decline.

In 2001, 2,079,017 people identified themselves as Christian (57% of the population). Five years later that had dropped to 2,062,752 (51% of the population). Anglican figures

nationally mirror this decline: 732,048 in 1996, 580,641 in 2001 and 554,925 in 2006. A 24% decrease!

Our own Diocesan graph looks like this:



I am very aware that statistics don't tell the whole story. There is no way of telling how much of this is due to people leaving the church, or the changing patterns of church attendance. When I started at Nativity there were a significant number of people who came to church both morning and evening. By the time I left, there were very few. There are many folk who now come only three Sundays out of five because of other activities but still consider themselves committed. But even these explanations reflect a crisis of vision.

And alongside this I'd want to reflect on the challenge of discovering how to relate effectively to men.

3. Difficulty in maintaining relevance to children and young people

Children's ministries are a shadow of what they were 20 years ago. We only have a few youth groups and virtually no worship events that cater specifically for them. Young people say that the one thing they are looking for when they come to church is to have an encounter with God and they find they have to go somewhere else to experience that. We recognise that it is ministry intensive and it's hard to find the committed volunteers anymore – particularly those with the vision for these ministries.

4. The state of the Anglican Communion internationally

The resolutions passed by the Episcopal Church at their recent convention continue to deeply divide the Anglican Communion despite the Archbishop of Canterbury's pleas for restraint. Unfortunately the revisionist movement within Western Christianity, which is strongly embedded in the Episcopal Church, taints us by association. This is one of the reasons why I am so concerned that to have a Strategic Plan that binds us together as a Diocese within a strong, orthodox statement of faith.

We will be discussing the Ridley draft of the Anglican Covenant during this Synod and, without trying in any way to pre-empt that discussion, I simply want to say this is the Archbishop of Canterbury's only strategy for holding the communion together.

5. Rural changes:

It was tempting to include this into the section that looked at changes within society but because 2/3rds of our parishes have a significant rural focus the particular challenges facing rural New Zealand in the top of the South need to be reflected on separately.

We have seen the break-up of large units into 'life-style blocks' and the amalgamation of smaller units into large conglomerates. This has led to a dramatic depopulation in once thriving rural communities. The global meltdown has coincided with a glut in the wine market. But on the positive side the influx of seasonal workers, especially in Marlborough has given new life to several parishes over there – but has brought its own pastoral challenges.

6. The Global Recession

We are told that the global recession is over and we are seeing signs of growth. However the effects of the global meltdown will continue to be felt for some time. While unemployment may not reach double figures it will still hover around 9.7% and this will – as always - affect the most vulnerable members of our community. On a very practical level, the dramatic fall in interest rates directly affects our Trust Investments and therefore the discretionary income for supporting ministry within the parishes and the Diocese.

These are a summary of just some of the barriers and challenges to our mission and ministry. They are part of this document, not to paralyse us into inaction, but to give a sense of intentionality and focus to our strategic planning. Which brings me onto Part Two: the five strategic priorities that I believe are vital in responding to some of the challenges I have just outlined and critical to the growth and development of our church – our parishes, our mission districts and our ministry units. I want to spend the last minutes of my charge to Synod presenting these five priorities. There is a Part Three to the Strategic plan but, as you will see when it is handed out, it is still a work in progress. It is probably the most important part of the ongoing work because it begins to explore the 'how' question.

Strategic Priority One: Developing Leaders

It is our strategic intent in the next five years to develop confident, creative and spiritually healthy leaders across the diocese with a clear understanding of the gospel, discipleship and ministry as participating in the mission of God, reflecting a diversity of leadership styles and modes as appropriate to a range of ministry contexts, challenges and needs. To nail it down a little more specifically as a strategic outcome: In five years we want to see the identification, nurture and formation of a new generation of leaders (both lay and ordained) for fresh and reinvigorating ministry initiatives. And to see existing leaders actively embracing opportunities to grow professionally for ministry with a clear sense of mission and outreach.

I have never made a secret of the fact that this is one of my driving passions because I believe that we have a leadership crisis in the church. The Anglican Church in New Zealand is experiencing the consequences of several decades of second-rate theological education at a national level and those of us who survived and grew through it are the exception rather than the norm. Several key evangelical parishes around the country have had to look overseas for their new Vicars and the last two Episcopal electoral synods in New Zealand

have chosen from overseas. Our inability to produce inspiring leadership is a litmus test to the state of health of the Anglican Communion. And that deeply concerns us as a Diocese.

The continued support for, and development of, Bishopdale Theological College is central to this strategy, but even more foundational are parishes that embrace the vision and provide an inspirational seed-bed for emerging leaders. Tim Harris will tease this out later in his report to Synod. But this is also about the ongoing growth of existing leaders. It is a totally different world that we minister within now than the world of even ten years ago. A commitment to growth is a commitment to relevancy.

Strategic Priority Two: A Deepening Commitment to Discipleship.

This year's theme of 'discipleship' has captured the imagination of many parishes and individuals. The emerging generation has a hunger and thirst for a counter-cultural life in Christ that rejects the wafer-thin spirituality of 'froth and bubble' Christianity and also the dead formality. They *are* looking for something different – but first of all they want to see it – not just hear it! Our strategic intent is to create a culture within our churches that encourages a selfless and obedient lifestyle amongst those who desire to follow Christ.

And again, the more specific outcome is to see a greater commitment to, and involvement in, the ministry and mission of the church and increasing evidence of Christ like character.

Strategic Priority Three: Growing our ministries with children, youth and young adults

Deuteronomy 6:1-2

These are the commands, laws and regulations that the Lord your God told me to teach you so that you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy, and so you and your children and grandchildren might fear the Lord your God as long as you live.

And 6:6-7 – 'You must commit yourselves whole heartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children.'

Matthew 18:2-6

'He called a little child and had him stand among them.

And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children,⁵ you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.'

Mark 9:36-37

He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Are we are Bible believing Church? When are we going to take it seriously. Our strategic intent is to ensure that every parish is aware of the unique spirituality of children, youth and young adults and looks for appropriate and strategic ways of responding. And the specific outcome? To have key ministries to children, youth and young adults in each of our four

regions that serve as a resource to the rest of the parishes in that region; ministry to and ministry of the children, youth and young adults.

Folks, I have to say that I'm not really interested in having a table of youth reps here at our Synod. I want young people – teenagers and young adults fully involved in the life of this Synod because it is the church that they love. Next Synod I want, at the very least, to have a young person as one of the alternate chairs of Synod.

Strategic Priority Four: Establishing new missional initiatives.

Am I starting to sound like a broken record?

(Actually, just thinking culturally for a few moments - probably in 10 years no-one will have a clue what I mean when I talk about a broken record!!!!) I said earlier that it's not the Church of God that has a Mission: It is the God of Mission who has a Church. Mission is not an optional extra. It is the very heart of who we are His people. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of Mission (Acts 1:8) and we must be constantly looking for the new wineskins that are going to enable that mission. Our strategic intent is that in five years every ministry unit will be thinking missionally.

And the specific outcome? To have at least one parish based and one non-parish focused missional initiative in each deanery and to have a Diocesan budget that reflects the call to be a missional church.

Strategic Priority Five: Developing the public witness of the diocese.

The 150th celebration showed us how open the community was and is to partner with the church – if the church is willing to have a visible witness. This Strategic Intent is very simple. It is to lift the profile of 'nelsonanglican' (the parishes, diocese and bishop) in the wider community through our public voice and our acts of service.

I've said enough. It's in your hands now. And I must confess to feeling very nervous. I have lived this document for months – it reflects my heart and my passion. I'm happy for you to debate it. I'm happy for you to change it. But I will be deeply disappointed if you clap your hands and say, "well-done Bishop" and then politely ignore it.

I want you to imagine what this Synod might look like in five years time full of a new generation of leaders who are passionate about the Gospel and the church. A Synod with ordained representatives from a brand new children's church; a Synod that gets down on its knees and prays and seeks the heart and mind of God in prayer and fasting as a tangible sign of their discipleship. Is it a crazy dream?

Its your decision now.