

Our Vision 2007

By
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Introduction

Without a vision, the people perish;
the famous King James translation of Proverb 29:18.

Without a vision, the people perish, and it's true isn't it.
Without a vision, vibrant communities dissipate,
without a vision, well meaning churches wallow and wane, and eventually die.

At present, a number of churches in our city are struggling,
over the next 20 years, I think we're going to see a few go under.
It's a depressing reality,
due in no small part to their lack of meaningful vision.

Speaking of the past 20 years, in another context, John Maxwell observes
that *all* the effective churches he's known
have *been* effective because they had vision,
because they could see where they wanted to go.

That vision focussed and energised their efforts,
it provided the much needed momentum to push through the inevitable
challenges they faced.

A visionary church is a *contagious* church, Maxwell contends,
a *unified* church,
a *sacrificial* church,
a *growing* church.

When God's people join in pursuit of a vision,
commitment builds, unity strengthens, morale soars, resources flow;
wonderful things begin to happen.

In a church *without* vision, it's the opposite story.
Here, energy ebbs low, commitment wavers,
personal agendas surface undermining unity, ministries suffer, resources fall
short, achievements if any, are limited.

Helen Keller was once asked: *What would be worse than being born blind?*
To which she replied: *Having sight without vision.*

Well folks, today I want to talk about *our* vision.
I want to refresh your memories,
God willing, I want to stir your hearts.

The 3 C's

The St George's vision is encapsulated in three words: *Communion*,
Community, and *Commission*.

Basically, it's all about *meeting*,
not meetings, important as they are,
meeting!

Face to face, heart to heart, open, honest, respectful engagement,
the kind of meeting, the kind of sharing that *changes* us for the better.

At St George's, we have a vision to meet with *God* (Communion),
with *one another* (Community),
and *the world* (Commission).

Together, these three C's articulate our reason for being – our purpose, our
focus, our direction, our motivation.

Everything we do, every event, every interaction, every activity,
we hope and pray,
will enhance these three crucial relational dimensions.

Communion

Communion, as you will guess, has a lot to do with *worship*.

At St George's, we believe we're called to *encourage* and *enhance* the
worship of God.

In a country of *self* worshippers,
true worship, worship in *Spirit and truth*, is counter cultural, is subversive, and
ultimately, deeply transformative.

Worship, we believe, is our *highest* calling.
It is *for* worship that God the Father *created* us,
for worship that God the Son *redeems* us,
for worship that God the Holy Spirit *enlivens* us,
it is *from* worship, that everything else flows.

Crucial in all of this are times of *corporate* worship– our services.
The times we gather to exalt and extol the name and work of God,

the times we gather around word and sacrament to listen and learn,
to reorient our distracted lives,
to unload our heavy burdens,
to receive forgiveness, encouragement, direction.

At St George's, we ask you to make worship a priority, your number one priority. Heaven knows, God deserves it!

In response, we will work hard to prepare meaningful, God-honouring, liturgy and music and sermons.

We will also encourage you to live *a life* of worship;
a life *in communion* with God.

We'll encourage you to live *prayerfully, generously, faithfully* – wherever you are, whatever you're doing, whatever the cost.

At St George's we have a vision for communion.

Community

From worship, from communion, flows the next dimension – community.

As worshippers of the triune God we are *bound together* by God,
We are a people, a fellowship, a church.

As God's people we have a vision to *welcome, love* and *serve* one another,
to *forgive* and *carry* one another's burdens,
to *encourage* and *bear with* one another,
to *care for* and *build* each other up.

As God's community, we desire to be *a community of celebration*,
acknowledging and *sharing* life, all of it,
the ups, the downs, the sorrows, the joys.

In God's community, nothing is unimportant, and nothing, beyond redemption.

It sounds good, but celebrating *all* of life is a tough call,
it means being real and open and honest,
taking off our masks, letting down our guard,
and being committed to one another.

As God's community, we have a vision to be *a collaborating* community,
sharing in ministries, as the Spirit calls and equips us,
sharing generously of the time, and talents, and money and possessions entrusted to us.

Working *together* is so much better than working alone.
Working together we can achieve so much more,
And, have fun.

Collaboration, working together, is a big part of our vision.

As God's community, we also aspire to be a *learning* community,
a community of *disciples*,
learning from Jesus,
learn from the Scriptures,
from the past, from our mistakes,
from our Anglican heritage,
from one another.
Learning to live together,
learning to *live for*, to love and share Christ, *that* is our vision.

Commission

As with community, our vision for mission flows from our connection with God.

Our God is the God who is overflowing with love for the world he created.

Our God is the God who empties himself in love for a world he is redeeming.

Our God is the God whose love is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit, working in our hearts. (Rom 5:5)

As lovers of God, we love what God loves.

God loves *the world*,

enough to send his Son, enough to suffer and die.

In turn,

he sends us, out into the world, equipped and empowered by the Spirit.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, Jesus says (Jn 20:21),

And that, we believe, includes *us*, each and every one of us.

And so, compelled by the love of God,

we envision a world *transformed* by love,

a world where beauty and compassion are nurtured,

and where the fragile environment is respected and preserved.

With Isaiah, we dream of a world

where swords become plowshares

and spears, pruning hooks;

where rifles are welded into rocking chairs

and bombs are painted with slogans of peace.

We work and pray for a world where the sounds of guns and the cries the hungry are silenced,
where the sick have clean water and medicine,
where refugees find a welcome and a home,
where leaders place justice ahead of privilege and power,
and ordinary people care enough to show it.
We pray and work for a world where those who've never heard of the name of Jesus have the opportunity to hear him call *their* name.

In our vocations, we strive to make a difference, however small,
to be salt and light,
to nurture seeds of grace and hope,
to share Christ, in word and deed.

Needing help

In broadest terms, this is our vision,
if you commit to St George's this is what we'll ask of you,
this is what we'll encourage you to do:
to love God,
to love your fellow believers,
to love the world.

Each of the three C's, you'll notice, has a prefix 'com',
it's not *union*, it's *com*-union, it's not unity, it's *com*-unity,
it's not mission, it's *com*-mission.

That little prefix 'com' is a subtle reminder that our vision is only possible *together* –
with God's help,
and, with each other.

Doing it together, that's the vision – God and us, quite a team!

Specific vision for 2007

Flowing from this broad picture, we have some specific goals for the coming year.
They relate particularly to *strengthening our staff* and *enhancing our space*.

A part time *Children and Families Minister* will help us to reach, and form, and release our younger generation.

A part time *Discipleship and Teaching Minister* will enrich our learning, helping us to be more grounded in the faith.

The extra facilities will boost our capacity to engage with each other, and to offer hospitality to the broader community.

I hope you will work to help us achieve these goals – by praying and serving, and giving!

If we all band together we get there a lot easier and quicker.

Challenges and priorities

In closing, I want to refer you to the diagram in your bulletin.

This diagram is a summary of our responses to last years NCLS. They relate to what they have articulated as 9 Core Qualities of healthy church life.

The diagram gives us a sense of where we are doing well, and of where we can continue to grow.

In the qualities listed as: *Alive and Growing Faith, Intentional and Welcoming Inclusion, Vital and Nurturing Worship, Willing and Effective Faith-sharing, Strong and Growing Sense of Belonging*, our ranking, as compared with 6000 other churches, was average, or just above.

We ranked significantly higher with regard to *Acts of Service, Innovation, Vision, and Leadership*.

When core qualities are clustered into broad categories, we are strongest in (what they call) Inspirational Core Qualities (i), those qualities that enable churches to adapt and move forward: *Innovation, Vision, Leadership*.

Isn't that good. I guess it reflects in part, the strength of our new governance structure with its broader, more dispersed, leadership.

When it comes to engagement with the world, the Outward Core Qualities (ii)

(*Service, Faith-sharing, and Inclusion*), we are clearly more comfortable offering *Service* in the name of X, than we are with sharing our *Faith* directly - a quality we would obviously like to strengthen.

In terms of Internal Core Qualities (iii),

qualities that reflect the inner life of the community
it is perhaps time to refocus some energy on strengthening our sense of
belonging, and our general corporate life.
Perhaps, with all the adjustments, we feel a bit displaced,
a little less comfortable than we once did.
That's ok, it's something we can all work on –
being hospitable, helping each other find their place.

Of course, statistics can be dangerous as well as helpful.
Our sample comprised only 108 people from our 6,8 and 10 cong's,
core quality rankings were ascertained from just one question.
There's a lot more to the picture,
although clearly we *can* learn from what they tell us.

Conclusion

I'll leave you to ponder, I hope we can have a lot more conversation about all
of this.

In the meantime, let me encourage you to be three 'C' people,
in all your interactions,
people committed to meeting deeply – with God,
with one another, and
with the world.

God's gift to you, to us, is our potential.

We at St George's have so much!
Our gift back to God
is what we *do* with that potential.

As a church *with* vision,
let us see the possibilities;
and let us be dedicated to converting these possibilities
into *reality*,
that *God* might be worshipped and glorified,
that *our brothers and sisters* might be built up in Christ,
that *the world* may be transformed,
reflecting, with ever increasing strength,
the compassion, justice, and peace of God.

