

Becoming All God Wants Us To Be – 1

10am HC – St George's Hillmorton
16 February 2013

Mark 4:26-29

Introduction

Thanks to Hilary and leadership for the invitation to speak on my still new role within the diocese and how it intersects with St. George's, where Jackie and I worship.

My passion is for the local church and I love the imagery in the bible of the church as the bride of Christ – the church is to be cherished, to be loved and to be prepared for the coming of her bridegroom – Jesus.

- So my role across the diocese is helping churches become healthy and to grow as they become all that God wants them to be as we prepare for the return of Jesus, the bridegroom!

How do churches grow and how do we define health?

1. *The bible gives us some important clues:*

Mark 4:26-29 – **slide 2**

All by itself – God gives the growth.

See also Acts 2:42-47 - **slide 3** and

See also 1 Cor 3:6 - **slide 4**

When it comes to growing churches we need to recognise our role and God's role. – **slide 5**

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God gives the growth.

We are responsible for the growth environment:

E.g. pot plant needs:

- water
- nutrients
- light
- room for roots.

2. How Do We Define Health? What is the Growth Environment in a Church?

Christian Schwarz: - **slide 6**

- Mistake to copy other churches
- Are there any church growth principles that are true, regardless of:
 - culture
 - theology
 - setting
 - liturgical tradition

Research: - **slide 7**

- 1,000 churches
- 32 countries
- 18 languages
- 5 continents

Findings: 8 quality characteristics present in all growing churches whatever their context, setting, etc - **slide 8**

My primary role within the diocese is to encourage and help churches grow in these qualities!

I know some of you may have seen a presentation on these 8 quality characteristics by the Archdeacon Missioner and this

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morning I won't go into any details, but I will just quickly remind you of them:

The 8 Essential Qualities

Empowering Leadership – **slide 8.1**

In Empowering Leadership all leaders in the church intentionally seek to identify, train and empower other leaders, giving them responsibility for people and ministry, and rejoicing when they do better than they do! Empowering leaders lead and empower others to lead. They explain, motivate and liberate through mentoring and on-the-job training.

Gift-based Ministry – **slide 9**

Every individual is unique and serving the Kingdom of God is based on a person's gifts and skill. Gift-based Ministry helps people identify their particular and unique God-given passions, gifts, skills and personality which enables them to serve in a way that changes the world for the better. As they serve in this way people are fulfilled and flourish in their mission and ministry both within and outside the church community.

Passionate Spirituality – **slide 10**

It is a spirituality that is authentic and real, which hungers for God and has a vibrancy of faith. People have a living and infectious personal relationship with Jesus Christ, nurtured through prayer, worship and spiritual disciplines, including sacrificial giving. They manifest the fruit of the Spirit in every aspect of their lives as they pursue holiness and obedience and are prepared to suffer for the sake of others.

Effective Structures – **slide 11**

The structures exist to enable the church to function effectively and for the 8 Essential Qualities to flourish. The ministries of the

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church have clear goals and purposes and members understand the church's mission. Structures are flexible, able to adapt and change as necessary to facilitate further growth. All the structures of the church serve the mission and purpose of the church.

Inspiring Worship – **slide 12**

Inspiring Worship is about quality rather than style. It will be a high point of the week, and is so inspiring people will want to bring along people who do not have a Christian faith to experience it. Visitors who come are able to enjoy the experience. Inspiring worship helps us to meet with Jesus. It provides space and opportunity for a mutual encounter with God Himself. Inspiring worship is transformative ... people's lives change for the better as a result!

Holistic Small Groups – **slide 13**

Holistic Small Groups are any church group which is small, and they behave like 'mini-church'. In Holistic Small Groups closer relationships can be formed and the members engage in worship, they pray – for others and each other, give pastoral support, encouraging ongoing discipleship, Bible application and outreach. Holistic Small Groups enable people to use their spiritual gifts and they plan to grow and multiply themselves.

Need-oriented Outreach – **slide 14**

Need-oriented Outreach is seen in people and Christian communities filled with the Holy Spirit involved in the messiest parts of the parish.... the people who are hurting the most, the poorest, the most isolated, the ones who need loving the most...etc. The only reason for doing this is to love people with Christ's love.

Members can talk naturally about their faith, sharing it with others. New disciples are made and the church has clear processes to help them along the stepping stones to and in discipleship.

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Loving Relationships – **slide 15**

The church is characterised by a fun, welcoming and forgiving atmosphere, reflected in relationships that are loving, affirming and encouraging. Healthy churches were shown to have a lot of laughter in them. The church is welcoming, accessible and inclusive and reflects the wider community.

These 8 Quality Characteristics are found in all growing churches across the world and I want to be part of a church like that, where:

- The leaders empower others;
- People serve according to their passion and gifts
- Members have a deep personal faith in Jesus
- The structures are effective In serving the church's purpose
- The worship is inspiring
- The Small Groups are holistic
- The outreach meets the community at its point of need
- Relationships are characterised by love.

For me this is a wonderful description of the church as the Bride of Christ!

Developing the Qualities

My task is to work with churches across the diocese to help them grow and develop in each of these 8 qualities.

To do this we are encouraging parishes to engage in a regular, ideally annual, cycle of: - **slide 16**

1. Reflection – which includes a survey of a sample of the congregation to get detailed and objective information about the health of the 8 qualities of the church.

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2. Planning - making simple 3 point plan to improve the weakest area.
3. Action – acting on the information and the putting the plans into practice.
4. Repeat

The diocese are also providing a mentor to help churches in this process:

- to guide them through the process
- to encourage everyone as they work together
- to provide ongoing support and encouragement

Minimum Factor – slide 17

One of the principles we are encouraging churches to apply is to work on their weakest characteristic

- see diagram for explanation. Raising the level of the weakest quality will increase the capacity of the barrel.

I hope in the coming months St George's will engage fully in this process, and this morning is part of that process.

Conclusion

But before I close I want to remind us why we might want to do this: - **slide 18**

Ephesians 4:12-16 Paul tells us that Jesus gives each one of us gifts – so that we can work together to help the church, the bride of Christ, become all He wants us to be.

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This can only happen when we each become all that God wants us personally to be, when these qualities are found in each one of us

- when I empower other people
- when I use my gifts for others
- when I am passionate about Jesus
- when my life is structured to effectively serve God
- when I am an inspired worshipper
- when I am sharing my life with others
- when I serve the wider community and share my faith
- when my relationships are loving

I long for that day when the church, the bride of Christ is ready for the coming of the bridegroom, when we are built up, in unity, mature and become like Christ himself.

That's what this is all about – the church and we as part of the church, becoming all that God wants us to be – then we shall see it grow “all by itself”.