

A Discussion Paper for Local Mission and Ministry
By Bishop Rob Hardwick. Epiphany 2014.

Eight out of ten churches fewer than one hundred members (the two remaining are usually new church plants) are viewed as a "friendly family" and not as a "focused fellowship." Friendly is a good thing, but not if it prevents you from reaching new people and serving your community. Friendly families are just that, very close and connected, but they can be closed to outsiders and resist growth.

A focused fellowship is still warm and friendly, but is focused on its vision and mission. The small church must be itself, and yes, enjoy the warmth of close relationships, but the shift is in the ultimate purpose for gathering. The ultimate purpose is not solely for the sake of the existing membership, it is to 'know Christ and make him known'.

A focused fellowship will have a mission action plan: A vision which is faithful to God's Great Commission and Great Commandment in the local and regional context: A mission action plan that targets resources and strategies to fulfill the vision. This will not be an over-night process, especially as not all current leaders have received training on visioning and the equipping and developing of their congregations. For all this to happen, much prayer and discernment will be required. A parish visioning process, mission action plan and considerable parish education will have to be initiated. A regional leadership team will enable training and education to be targeted at the parish level and help with the financial and people resources to aid this process.

A focused fellowship may have to cut back on some of their church programmes in order to free up resources to reach people outside their church and may have to make tough decisions, including the toughest decision of all, the decision that causes some people to leave. This is the greatest challenge especially to a small church. It feels counter-intuitive. "We only have 28 people, why would we do anything that might risk result losing 9 people?" However, a John 15 pruning may be required; a pruning of the practices that have led to the diminished fruitfulness of the vine of Christ. Tough decisions may be needed to clear the way for the growth and service to the community that God desires for His Church and Kingdom.

A focused fellowship will devote efforts to nurture and discipleship. Nurturing new people to faith and discipling every member for ministry is vital to continued growth. The diocesan vision is that every Anglican be rooted in Scripture and prayer, regular in worship, outreaching in compassion and ready to share their faith. Gift discovery, prayerful discernment and mentorship will be important component pieces in releasing people to operate in their giftedness and disciplines. However before that, faith based resources that lead people to and in faith; quality Bible studies; how to pray groups and good preparation courses for baptism, confirmation and beyond will be required.

A focused fellowship is intentional about its planning for corporate worship and encouraging of its individual members to worship. The focus should be upon God and not our own preferred style or practice. Worship should draw each person into the presence of God; to be nourished in word and sacrament and sent out to live the Christ-like life in Spirit and in truth.

A focused fellowship will devote efforts to succession planning. Together with discipling for every member ministry, discipling new leaders, is also vital to continued growth. From 1999 several people were raised up by their parishes to serve as local ordained priests. We are now seeing these faithful servants come to retirement but where are the Joshua's, the Junias' and Elisha's to take their place? Where are the future leaders? Who is God calling to take on the mantle of leadership? These should be frequent and timely questions asked of individuals and parishes and offered to God in prayer

A focused fellowship will emphasize an authorized, ordered and healthy leadership model. The chaplaincy role is a strong traditional model in most of our churches. The priest, or in some cases the deacon, whether they be seminary trained or trained locally for ministry, is seen in many congregations as the ministry deliverer to the baptized, rather than a vocational ministry and mission developer of the baptized. No one should bear this responsibility alone. Biblical images of the body speak to this and a healthy body is one that operates, with each member doing their part under the headship of Christ. In the ordination service of a deacon (BAS p 655), the shared missional task of all the baptized is emphasized, affirming that 'Every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit and that some are called to specific forms of leadership, directly under the authority of a Bishop'. In the calling of the one person to be priest or deacon 'in charge', we may have missed an important ingredient, the calling of the team, both lay and ordained leaders, each with specific responsibilities. This is why, in addition to priests, deacons and church wardens, licensed, trained and educated Lay Readers will be re-introduced to the diocese this year to work alongside other colleagues in ministry. The Lay Reader will be authorized to preach, teach, lead non-sacramental worship and officiate at funerals in the parish and across the region. It is hoped that other authorized ministries may emerge which function at the parish or regional level to bolster every leadership team.

I pray that the above and the text below will aid us *"to dream dreams big enough that God has the elbow room to maneuver"*

Seven Deadly Sins that Impede Ministry

1. To allow the clergy and people to think that the clergy are "the ministers" and the people are the consumers. **ALL THE BAPTIZED ARE MINISTERS.**
2. To allow the people to think that they are volunteers. **WE HAVE COVENANTED WITH GOD TO MINISTER IN GOD'S WORLD WHEREVER WE MAY BE: WORKPLACE, FAMILY, CHURCH OR COMMUNITY.**
3. To allow someone to think that "their" ministry is the most important. **THERE IS ONE MINISTRY - THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST. ALL OF OUR MINISTRIES ARE IN SERVICE TO JESUS' MINISTRY.**
4. To think that any individual can fill any position. **EACH PERSON IS ENDOWED WITH UNIQUE GIFTS. THE FAITH COMMUNITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL TOGETHER MUST DISCERN WHAT THOSE GIFTS ARE.**
5. To ask a person with discerned gifts to enter a ministry without detailing the expectations, providing training or the resources needed to accomplish the ministry. To offer an opportunity to minister, to support and then not to carry through.
6. To allow the faith community to think that "church activity" is the only arena of ministry or that it is more important than being Christ's representative wherever you are in the world.
7. To allow the ministries in the workplace, family, church and community to go unnoticed and unappreciated. **PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE IN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY. TELL THEM THAT YOU DO PRAY FOR THEM AND THAT YOU ARE THANKFUL FOR THE MINISTRY THEY CARRY OUT AS REPRESENTATIVES OF JESUS.**

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