

ST NINIAN'S CASTLE DOUGLAS CONGREGATIONAL CONSULTATION
Sunday September 20th 2009 1.45 – 4.00 pm



The aim of the afternoon's programme was to take stock of where St Ninian's had 'got to' as a congregation and what it might be being nudged by God to 'do' and 'be' in the next few years. Rather than using the word 'change' or even 'development', we structured our discussions around the theme of 'journeying in the footsteps of Saint Ninian'. The preceding sermon had spoken of Ninian's obedience to the call of God to be an Apostle of the Good News amongst the peoples of Galloway, and had laid down a challenge to you as 21st century Christians to go and do likewise.

GATHERING

We began by thinking about '**what's currently working well at St Ninian's?**' It is always helpful when conducting an exercise of this nature to begin by dwelling on the gifts God has already blessed us with, and by taking the time to appreciate and celebrate these things. As St Paul said to the community at Philippi, '*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about these things*'.

In table groups, you listed the following:

companionship and friendship	Sunday's School
welcome	Meditation Group
warm ambience	Lent Study Groups
availability of volunteers	'this is <u>the</u> church of Castle Douglas'
Flower Ladies' rapport	website
Thursday Club	magazine
Men's Group	the Hall is used by numerous (30) groups
Mother's Union	sense of outreach
Rector's preaching	Christian Aid
support of Rector's wife	Fair Trade church
music	

This list illustrated a high level of satisfaction with the internal fellowship of the congregation and its worshipping life, and a concern for the wellbeing of the wider community, both local and global.

We then moved on to asking, '**what does it feel like at this stage of the journey?**', each table contributing a one-word answer:

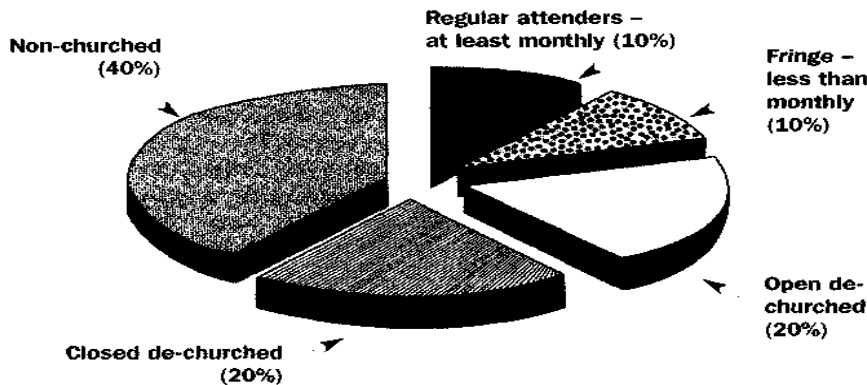
plateau
togetherness
comfortable (complacency/smugness)
anchor – beacon
challenged
recruitment

This was an interesting, and very self-aware, mix. You are aware that you are a contented congregation with a high sense of internal agreement and fellowship (*togetherness*) and thus can be a sign (*beacon*) of that way of living together for others in the community. But you are also aware that this (*comfortable*) position must not become a pedestal upon which you rest and remain – that way stagnation lies (*plateau*) and a consequent failure to grow (*recruitment*) - but rather a springboard from which to leap forth in answer to God's insistent call (*challenged*) to be a pilgrim people, a missionary people .

So if God is challenging you to move out of your comfort zone, then we need to ask **'with whom is God calling you to journey now?'**

Some statistics that had been alluded to in the sermon: 40% per cent of the population are 'de-churched'. At some point

in their life they attended church. Of these, 20% are the 'open de-churched' - people who have left church at some point, but are open to return if suitably contacted and invited. (*Back to Church Sunday*). 20% of the population have attended church at some point in their life, but were disillusioned, and have no intention of returning; they are the 'closed de-churched'. **40% of the population nationally have never been to church, except perhaps for the funeral or wedding of a friend or relation; they are the 'non-churched'.**



You identified the following populations in your community with whom you have tangential contact through their use of the Hall (30 organisations):

youngsters under 10 and their carers
wildlife enthusiasts
members from other denominations
Third and Fourth Age people
flower arrangers

yoga enthusiasts
Buddhists
people meeting to meditate
choir members

What is fascinating about this list of Hall-users is that *their* motivations/values map onto what we would call 'Kingdom values':

- care for the well-being of the young and for those who have responsibility to help them grow
- concern for the proper flourishing of the elderly
- a love of music
- attention to the 'sacramental' nature of matter (music, flowers)
- care for God's creation
- silence, contemplation
- attention to the body as the locus of the Spirit

But how many **explicit links** are there between these user-groups and the worshipping community? You were able to identify *some* linkages made through the Rector, his wife, the MU and Ros (Little Fishes), and *some* 'connecting events' such as concerts, but these were few and far between. **There is quite a disjunction between what goes on in church and what goes on in the Hall; the two worlds are separate.**

Looking back at the *raison d'être* of the Hall project, you stated that you wanted to be more 'outward-looking', more involved with the life of the local community. You have undoubtedly created a superb facility for organisational use – but *are you really any more involved than before?* Do the people of Castle Douglas know what is the Good News that you believe in a way they did not before the Hall was built?

Bishop Laurie Green, in his book *Let's Do Theology* writes:

Many congregations separate out their action from their theological reflection. Throughout the week their church and church hall may be full to the gunnels with active groups, everything from day centres and toddlers' clubs to unemployment drop-in centres. But all that activity may be completely separated off from the worshipping community. The latter do their theological reflection on Sunday mornings, but maybe do not even know the people who are involved with all the action that goes on during the rest of the week. This is anything but a united cycle of action and reflection. The worshippers may be lulled into thinking they are part of an active and integrated church, but in fact they are just one half of a fractured cycle. If those who were active would only engage in theological reflection about their activity, and if those who were worshipping would take the risk of also venturing into responsive action together, then the whole parish enterprise would have more faithful theological integrity. The cycle would be made whole again.

GIRDING UP

Provisioning: If you are to engage in spreading the Good News more effectively to these 'populations' and making a bridge across 'the gap' we identified, (and so growing the congregation in size and width of age-range), then what assets do you *already* have for the journey? Or as we phrased it, '**what's already in your knapsacks?**'

People – a willingness of people to volunteer
Energetic clergyperson and wife
People with time on their hands

Plant in excellent condition
Financial stability
Versatility of space in the Hall

What other resources do you need for the journey and where will you get them from?

Your thoughts clustered around the issue of making what 'you are about' more visible and accessible:

- better signage about what the church is 'about', both on the outside and near the Hall door
- something to show who we are – eg a board with photographs of the church family
- creative thinking about the use of the Hall as a versatile worship space on occasion
- creative thinking about how to make worship more accessible
- a church 'Open Day' (or regular monthly 'Open Days'), perhaps linked with Harvest Festival
- a series of evening meetings for 'catechesis/learning about faith', open to members and the non-churched
- training in evangelism, thus making people feel more comfortable about/confident in faith-sharing
- training in being alongside at times of stress or bereavement
- audit of talents within the congregation (knowing what gifts we have) and also what involvement people have in the community (membership of Community Groups, voluntary activity etc)

What excess baggage might hinder us?

- ageing congregation
- too conscious of what we might lose
- is the varied service pattern an asset or a weight?

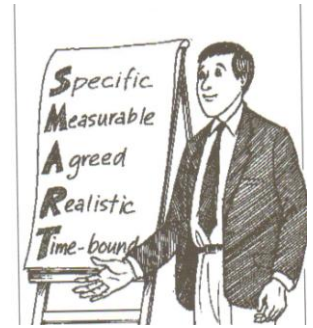
In regard to the last issue, it should be noted that research into growing congregations indicates that having targeted services for different ages/requirements is better than lumping everyone into one homogeneous service at 11am. And that thinking imaginatively about new **times** and new **places** for worship is also helpful; one of the growth areas is apparently to hold services around 4pm on a Sunday afternoon, which suits families, allowing them time together for activities on Sunday mornings. Taking church **to** the Hall user groups – eg a very short, simple act of worship while toddlers meet in the hall, services in residential homes, a study group in a coffee shop or pub - is also worth thinking about.

GOING ONWARDS

Route map: We ended by looking at concrete suggestions of steps that might be taken, ensuring that these were **SMART**. Goals need to be:

Specific: straightforward and clearly defined : *what* are you going to do? *why* is this important to do at this time? *what* do you want to accomplish? *how* are you going to do it?

Measurable: if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Choose a goal with measurable progress, so you can see the change occur. "I want to read 3 books of 100 pages on my own before my 8th birthday" shows the specific target to be measured. "I want to be a good reader" is not as measurable. Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goals.



Agreed: ensure that all 'stakeholders' are in agreement. How will you ensure that today's discussions are broadcast throughout the *entire* congregation? How will others' views be fed in? Who takes responsibility for progressing the planning? (eg the Vestry)

Realistic: realistic, in this case, means "do-able." It means that the learning curve is not a vertical slope and that the skills needed to do the work are available. A realistic project may push the skills and knowledge of the people working on it, but it shouldn't break them. Devise a plan or a way of getting there which makes the goal realistic. Be sure to set goals that you can attain with some effort! Too difficult and you set the stage for failure, but too low sends the message that you aren't very capable. Set the bar high enough for a satisfying achievement!

Timely: set a timeframe for the goal: for next week, in three months, and so on. And put an end point on your goal; that gives you a clear target to work towards. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. It tends not to happen because you feel you can start at any time. Without a time limit, there's no urgency to start taking action now.

So your **10 SMART targets** were as follows: (some need further thought and refinement):

1. Compile a list of people who are new to the area and invite them to coffee and chat in the Hall (How? compile this list from those known to each of you personally)
2. Invite Ros (who has the trust of the young parents) to run a 'Little Fishes' Open Day which involves looking round the church and talking about what goes on there
3. Work on the external appearance of the church, its signage etc, remembering the young man's impression of 'a closed church'.
4. Try to organise some form of 'reception committee' for Hall users
5. Think about the participation of children in worship (bearing in mind the parents' needs and wishes, and also the existing pattern of occasions when they take the service.) Consider a new form of Family Service or of having feedback during the Ablutions when the children report on what they have been doing that day in Sunday School.
6. Tidy up the passageway notice-board, clustering notices under itemised headings for easier recognition of church activities (*work already in hand!*).
7. Work on bereavement training (and other pastoral visiting skills) so as to be able to be alongside people in the community when they suffer loss.
8. Invite a member to be responsible for sending a card on behalf of the congregation at the anniversary of baptism/weddings. (Churches that work on 'keeping the back door shut' – ie making sure people don't drift away after they have been welcomed – grow better than those which concentrate solely upon opening wide the front door.
9. Think about training a Welcoming Team.
10. Think about having *Growing in Faith* (process evangelism) events in the Hall, perhaps with food/refreshments.

Progress towards our destination: Ensure that you build in opportunities to take stock of your progress towards these goals and also to celebrate successes on the way. It is not a bad idea to plan to have a facilitated meeting in a year's time to look back at what has been achieved in that time.

As Ministry Development Officer for this Diocese, I commit myself to being of service to you in any way you require on this journey. I am attaching by e-mail a workbook called *Welcoming Small Congregations* which may have material that is of some use to the Vestry as it works on ways of implementing these goals, and am also recommending a DVD and workbook called *Everybody Welcome* (Church House Publishing 2009), a short course which looks at imaginative ways of church growth and indeed of training a welcome/integration team.

Thank you for the privilege of worshipping with you and for warm hospitality over the weekend. I shall keep you in my prayers and look forward to hearing how things are progressing. May you boil with 'zeal' and be prepared to 'suffer' the birth pangs of change.

*Almighty God, through the preaching of your servant Ninian you made the light of the Gospel to shine in our land.
May we prove to you our thankfulness for his life and labours by following the example of his zeal and patience;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen*

**Anne Tomlinson
Ministry Development Officer
22.09.09**