



Making missional communities

A study course based on the
Diocesan Strategy

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Diocesan strategy course materials

'Missional Communities' is a title that's been used in lots of places to describe types of church. Actually though, it describes every church as we are all called to be missional communities - places of worship and praise, places of prayer and reflection, places where joys and sorrows can be shared amongst 'family'. Places also from which we are to go out and share our faith with others through our words and actions.

Most of us who've been part of a church for a long time will know that church isn't simply the place where people come and sit miserably for an hour or so before getting on with the rest of their lives, but that is still the perception of some people.

However, whilst we may appreciate our place in the church, there are few of us that don't occasionally wish it could be better, or different. Perhaps we hope it could be:

- more vibrant
- better organised or structured for mission
- a place of life long learning and growing in our faith
- a centre of the community, making a real difference in community
- a place where people depend on God who has given everything for us and
- who, day by day, continues to provide for us.

These are the themes of this study course!

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In 2015 the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon released their 'Diocesan Strategic Aims' Whilst the Diocesan strategy is a series of commitments made by the Diocese to Ministry Areas and people, what is being committed also needs to be mirrored in the actions of individuals and ministry areas as we seek to build the church and ultimately, and more importantly, the kingdom of God.

Underpinning all that we do as a Diocese is our vision of 'Gathering as God' people, Growing more like Jesus and Going out in the power of the Spirit: We do that as a family with all of our differences and gifts and we do it, rooted in Christ, who changes lives. As we think of the diocesan strategy and as we enjoy and share Gods love and power in our lives, we pray for a transformation of our diocese.

Each week our study is based on one of the strategic aims. Sessions begin with the aim and a related Bible verse. There is a short introduction and some questions The questions are guidelines, but may lead you to think in different directions as you reflect on the future of your Ministry Area and your own part within it.

Each week there is also a quotation relating in some way to the strategic aim, but more particularly this represents a challenge to each of us - a challenge offering inspiration but also a challenge which asks where we are now, where we would like to be and how we're going to get there.

To this end, the final exercise encourages people to come up with ideas as to how' the particular strategic aim can be 'translated' into an aim of the Ministry Area by coming up with at least one definite idea that can be considered for implementation in the area. At the end of this study the list can be brought together for discussion of the ideas in the Ministry Area Council (or another suitable group).

The weekly sessions should begin and end with a time of Worship. There are some suggestions for this included at the end of this booklet, but you may wish to put together your own.

Ian Rees

Week 1

A VIBRANT CHURCH

Strategic Aim 1: The diocese will have vibrant ministry areas for mission at the heart of our communities.

■ Bible Verse: Mark 1:17-18

And Jesus said to them, •Follow me: And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

■ Commentary

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he approached Simon and his brother Andrew. We don't really know to what extent Jesus was known to the fishermen, but we can see their reaction and commitment to his call to follow him. We all have hopes and expectations in our lives, some of which are fulfilled, some are not. The early disciples must have had similar hopes and expectations and must have surely experienced a 'roller coaster' on their journey with Jesus.

Their journey wasn't easy, both prior to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus and beyond. Our journey as disciples will often contain 'ups and downs' but we are called to remain faithful to the call of Jesus who invites us to follow him.

As individuals and as a church our own response to that call is one part of that consideration, but we are also called to share our faith with others. We are to witness to Jesus who has transformed us.

We do that in our gathering together in worship; we do it as we seek to grow more like Jesus, as we try to understand his will and purpose for us. And we do it as we go out in the power of the Spirit, boldly and confidently proclaiming good news for all people.

Quotation for reflection

Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream.

Crazy Christians - Michael Curry

Just a thought!

Michael Curry is the Presiding Bishop for the Episcopal Church in the United States. In this quote he's not advocating an abandonment of church, but that the church of today and tomorrow should be full of people 'following in the footsteps of Jesus'. Is that the church we are part of? If not, what is preventing that?

■ Questions

1. What were Simon and Andrew expecting as they left their nets to follow Jesus?
2. What did they see that made them react so quickly?
3. How does the eagerness to 'follow Jesus' relate to Our Ministry Areas?
4. What do we need, in spiritual terms, to allow our lives to be transformed by Jesus?
 - a. As we 'gather'
 - b. As we 'grow'
 - c. As we 'go out'
5. What do you 'picture' as a 'vibrant church'?

■ To be considered by all present

Thinking of this strategic aim, are there ideas or suggestions of things that would be useful for the ministry area to consider? *The object of these ideas is not to discuss them in detail now, but to put them forward for later consideration in the ministry area*

Week 2

ORGANISED FOR MISSION

Strategic Aim 2: The Diocese will be structured and governed for mission.

■ Bible Verse: Matthew 28:19

Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

■ Commentary

Last week we thought about what a vibrant church or ministry area might look like. We thought of the call of Jesus to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me". As we seek to make Jesus 'attractive' to people we often need to strip away some of the things we enjoy. The former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple famously said, 'the Church is the only organisation that exists for the benefit of its non-members.

Mission must be at the heart of what we do as a church. We are not entitled to preserve a club or an institution for our own enjoyment.

When Jesus left this 'Great Commission' he was encouraging us to seek ways of telling others about him and his love for them. It is a huge responsibility - but also a huge privilege. We are entrusted with life transforming news for people!

The strategic above may not be inspirational in its wording but it does perhaps

recognise a need to plan and organise mission effectively — it doesn't just happen. The most successful churches of all are where mission is at the heart of what they do. One thing a such churches have in common is a plan for growth; spiritually, numerically and in service to others.

When we gather as God's people we are called to think in a missional way. As we worship and as we meet in other contexts we are to celebrate the 'mission' that has brought us to faith. As we seek to grow more like Jesus we are to pray and seek strength and wisdom to know how we can reflect more of his life and love. As we go out in the power of the Spirit, we are to go with a confidence that we can help to transform lives and communities through the power of the Spirit working in and through us.

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Quotation for reflection

The church exists by mission just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church ...'

The Word and the World, 1931 – Emil Bruner

Just a thought!

It's easy to become distracted by the 'business' of church. There's plenty to do but a key question must always be asked, 'What (and who) are we doing it for?' We can always kill time looking after buildings and raising money and those things are not unimportant, but we need to make sure that in doing those things we're not killing off something more important, the centrality of Jesus in our churches and in our lives.

■ Questions

1. If mission is to be at the heart of the life of our churches/ ministry areas will they look different from how they look at the moment? If so, in what ways?
2. In what ways do we equate being 'structured and governed' for mission with the freedom to be open to do as God calls us to do? In other words, can structure and governance ever get in the way of mission? If so, how? Can we avoid that happening?
3. The Message Bible translates the beginning of this verse as 'God authorised and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life.. 'In what ways are we being 'trained' as disciples and what do we need to be in a position to 'train others?

■ To be considered by all present

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Week 3

GROWING AS DISCIPLES

Strategic Aim 3: The diocese will provide learning and discipleship programmes to deliver its mission.

■ Bible Verse: Luke 4:15

Jesus began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

■ Commentary

Synagogues were important centres of community in Jewish life. They were, much like churches in more recent times, places of worship but also places of community activity, such as schools and meeting houses. Leaders of synagogues would often invite visiting rabbi to teach. Jesus valued the synagogues as places to teach, and presumably therefore also as places where people would be able to learn.

Today as well as being people of mission and worship, we must have a desire to continue to learn more about Jesus, and as churches we must be committed to teaching. We know that the teaching of Jesus was 'praised' here in this verse, but we also know how quickly his message was rejected by some who felt threatened by him. When we gather as God's people we encourage one another and support one another. We are also encouraged to continually learn more about Jesus, enabling us to grow more like him. When we go out, we will go out in the power of the Spirit feeling more equipped and therefore more confident to tell others about Jesus.

Quotation for reflection

Jesus called disciples - students of life - to learn from him how to live in God's world God's way. Constantly learning and growing and evolving and absorbing. Tomorrow is never simply a repeat of today.

Love Wins — Rob Bell

Just a thought!

Lots of evidence suggests that growing churches often have small groups running week by week offering a chance to talk more about faith, to pray together, to reflect on the bible and just to enjoy each other! Our role as disciples becomes clearer when we spend more time working out what our role should be – day by day we are called to grow as we face new challenges and new opportunities and we meet new people. Where do we grow as Christians? Is there something more we should be doing?

■ Questions

1. When Jesus taught here, people praised him. What do you think changed as his ministry continued and why?
2. In what ways do we best learn about Jesus? If we have benefitted from bible studies, prayer groups or other small groups, is there anything we can share about them to encourage others?
3. How important is it for us to be more equipped with knowledge about our faith?
4. How willing are we to share our own stories of faith to help others in their own journeys?

■ To be considered by all present

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Week 4

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Strategic Aim 4: The diocese will seek to build God's kingdom in community and public life.

■ Bible Verse: Luke 10:36, 37

Jesus asked him, "Which of the three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He answered, "The one who showed him mercy! Jesus said, Go and do likewise"

■ Commentary

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known of the biblical parables. It reminds us of the need to care for others, whatever the situation and whoever they may be. We, like the Samaritan, may be called into positions which seem difficult or even alien to us, but we are called to recognise in all those around us something of the image of God.

As we gather as God's people, we are challenged to consider who is missing from our gathering, and why? As we seek to grow more like Jesus, we must be aware of the fact that he will probably not be just like us or how we want him to be! Growing like Jesus implies a willingness to be transformed and to see in others something of Jesus. As we go out in the power of the Spirit, we seek to be at the heart of our communities, playing our part in building them up for the good of all.

■ Questions

1. In what Ways does your church currently engage with the local community?
2. How aware of local needs are you and your local congregation? Are particular projects needed, or projects you could be involved in?
3. Who do we see as the 'marginalised' in society today and how do we respond to their needs?
4. Does the church have a 'public voice' in your community? If not, in what ways can this happen?

Quotation for reflection

William Booth ended his last ever public address in the Royal Albert Hall on 9th May 1912 with these words:-

'While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight. fight to the very end'.

Just a thought!

Britain of 100 years ago was very different to the country we know today but need still exists — sometimes in the same way, sometimes in new ways. What is our commitment as a church to 'fighting' for a better world, and how do we show that commitment?

■ **To be considered by all present**

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Week 5

SO, WHAT CAN WE GIVE?

Strategic Aim 5: The diocesan mission and ministry will be sustainable and resourced.

■ Bible Verse: Luke 14:28

Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?"

■ Commentary

Jesus is telling his listeners about the cost of discipleship. This verse is preceded by Jesus telling the people that 'whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple'. It is essential that all of us know the cost of our discipleship. In this country that can sometimes be hard to identify. We do not live under the threat of persecution and we do not have to pay a particularly heavy price for our faith. And yet, evidence would suggest that the church is strongest in places where it is most challenged.

Though we live in a relatively comfortable society with a high degree of religious freedom perhaps there are times when we need to take up the cross. It may be in financial commitments, it may be in time, in reading and studying the bible, making more room in our lives for prayer.

As individuals and as churches it's important that we plan for mission and ministry recognising the requirements of our own commitment to God, who has given us everything. How will we respond?

Gathering together as God's people is important. There are days and times when we perhaps don't feel like going to church, or we make arrangements to do something else. Sometimes that is inevitable and necessary but any gathering of God's people is missing something if you are not there.

Quotation for reflection

The purpose of creation is joy. In a world where we are often made to feel that the purpose of life is work, production, success, wealth or a host of other things, to be reminded that we are here in the fullest sense to enjoy God, ourselves and the creation is a huge relief, and a reminder that our selves are to be enjoyed in Christ, not to be taken too seriously. We are here for the glory of God, which shines most clearly when we enjoy him and his creation to the full

Graham Tomlin
The Widening Circle

Just a thought!

How often in church life do we get distracted from what is really important in our churches and in our spiritual lives. Indeed, do we know what is really important? Surely it is a relationship with God that changes us day by day. When we spend so much time thinking of what we're able to give in terms of time, talent or money to the church, should we not be considering whether there is anything we can't afford to give to God who gives us everything?

We grow more like Jesus as we commit ourselves to a life long journey of getting to know him better. It takes time and effort, just as it does in the building of any relationship, but there is no relationship more life transforming and rewarding.

Going out in the power of the Spirit means that we are willing to 'stand up' for Jesus in the community. There is a cost for us in that and we must measure that cost, bearing in mind always that we measure it against the things Jesus has done for us.

■ **Questions**

1. What does 'carrying the cross' mean for us today? How does this apply to us as a ministry area?
2. God has given us everything. What can we give in return?
3. What are our best resources as a ministry area? How can we use them best/ develop them?
4. What will be our costs? (This doesn't mean working out a literal budget now. Costs are not just financial)

■ **To be considered by all present**

Thinking of this strategic aim, are there ideas or suggestions of things that would be useful for the ministry area to consider? The object of these ideas is not to discuss them in detail now, but to put them forward for later consideration in the ministry area.

Suggestions for opening worship

Perhaps a candle may be lit and/or some music played. Periods of silence will also be helpful

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

We have been called;

we have been chosen.

Loving God, worthy of all praise and honour,

we come to offer our worship,

to be still and know that you are God;

open our eyes to your presence.

You are all good, all holy, merciful and loving, faithful and true;

open our eyes to your presence.

We lift up our hearts with joy,

our voices in thanksgiving, our lives in adoration;

open our eyes to your presence.

We thank you for the opportunity to pause, to take stock,

and to reflect on the things in life that really matter;

open our eyes to your presence.

We thank you that you want to teach us;

speak to us and deepen our relationship with you,

open our eyes to your presence.

Loving God, draw us closer to you,

so that when we return to our homes,

we may do so with renewed hope, vision, strength and faith'

open our eyes to your presence.

A time of prayer follows ending with all saying this prayer together:

Gracious God,

help us so to know that your love flows through us,

reaching upwards in worship,

inwards in fellowship and outwards in service,

to the glory of your name.

You have given your all for us,

teach us to give freely in return, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Suggestions for closing worship

Symbols such as candles may be used and music played. Periods of silence will also be helpful.

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

In the presence of God, who has called the earth and stars into being,

we stand in awe.

In the presence of God, whose arms have held children,

we stand in trust.

In the presence of God, whose breath has stirred within us
and caused our hearts to thirst for justice,

we stand in need.

Before you, giver of life, we come in faith,
in search of love and justice and wholeness;

be with us, hear us, we pray

A time of prayer and reflection on the things we have considered ending with all saying these prayers together:

Lord God,

**you have set before us a great hope that your kingdom will come on
earth, and taught us to pray for its coming:**

make us ever ready to thank you for the signs of its dawning,

and to pray and work for the perfect day

when your will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Father

**we hold before you our family in the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon,
and we open our hearts and minds to your Spirit:**

Bless us as we gather in your name;

guide us as we grow into the likeness of your Son;

lead us by your Spirit to go out and make disciples of others.

**God of our journeying, be our way, and our truth and our life,
our beginning and our end.**

We pray through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.