

Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge : Mission-shaped parish – traditional church in a changing context

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Notes Alison Morgan Feb 07

This book is a practical follow-on from Mission-shaped Church. I often find that 'in practice' books fail to live up to the freshness of their conceptual counterparts – but this one is different. It offers thoughtful discussions of ways in which ordinary parishes can experiment in the light of the changing relationship between church and culture, but without abandoning the strengths and experience they feel they already have. Peppered with little boxes carrying stories of things which have – or sometimes haven't – worked, it's an encouraging and stimulating read.

Preface

Topic – the church's traditional practices in a changing context. We face 2 mission fields – the unchurched, and the open dechurched. It's for the latter that the inherited richness of the church is potentially helpful.

God's mission is the chisel that shapes the Church – not the preferences or comfort of the Christians themselves.

1. The value of values – Paul Bayes

Tales of the PCC... how do you decide how to spend a legacy?? Only if you have a shared vision of God's purposes and a shared set of values.

David Bosch: 'mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still: *there is mission because God loves people.*' If this is our understanding of God, then our values will move us to mission. This is the heart of mission-shaped church.

Ever since the 1960's, secular thinking has used the word 'theology' to mean pointless and useless nattering.. In many places, mission has become a fringe activity, an optional extra, a series of initiatives which fail. We need mission-shaped church, not church-shaped mission (John Hull).

We need to ask questions – why do we.. how do they.. what are... - brainstorming sessions.

'Wise church people have learned to spot initiatives gathering in the distance, like storm clouds'... but this is bigger; to build a church's life on mission is to change everything, not just to change how things look.

2. That was then... a Church built on mission values – Paul Bayes

The example of Theodore of Tarsus, sent by the Pope in 668 to be archbishop of Canterbury. He founded the parish system, using the cultural context of expanding settlements as a vessel for mission. Nick Spencer, *Parochial Vision*, shows how fluid the parish system was in the 500 years after Theodore. The parish system is a missionary system, not a chaplaincy one.

The example of the Clapham Sect, living a shared life of faith in a single parish, and working for social change.

The example of John Wesley, founding classes (1-36 people coming together for teaching) and bands (4-8 coming together for shared discipleship).

In 1744 the 'Rules for Bands' laid out this: We intend:

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason,
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour with singing or prayer
4. To speak each of us in order freely and plainly the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

At every meeting the same 5 questions were asked:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

In addition they relied on weekly sacramental attendance at the parish church. Not complicated – just difficult! It gave us the pattern of the small group network – maybe our greatest gift to the world church.

The example of Charles Lowder – suspended for giving a choirboy eggs to throw at a would be churchwarden; went to France and returned to a sacramental ministry among the poor.

The example of Charles Blomfield, bishop of London, building for expansion – churches now being used for plants.

3. Mission-shaped worship – Tim Sledge

The church should derive its power to convert from its worship. Many are reluctant to invite friends to church because they don't actually find themselves that they can connect with God there; we aren't going to invite others to something we find uninspiring ourselves.

We live in a time of unprecedented social and cultural change, and often the church finds itself being asked to act as nostalgic havens from incessant change.

In one single day in 2005, there was as much trade as during the whole of the year of 1949, as much scientific research as during the whole of 1960, as many telephone calls as during the whole of 1983 and as many emails as during the whole of 1990.

Doing the traditional well – open themed services, eg Christingle, harvest, mothering Sunday (Kettering). Manchester's Back to Church initiative.

Paying attention to the main elements. This is Justin Martyr in 150 AD:

All, whether they live in the city or the countryside, are gathered together in unity. Then the records of the apostles are read . . . When the reader has concluded, the presider in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things. Then we stand and offer prayers . . . And, as we said before, when we have concluded the prayers bread is set out to eat, together with wine and water. The presider offers up prayer and thanksgiving, as much as he can, and the people sing out their assent saying the Amen. There is distribution. Those who are prosperous and desire to do so, give what they wish. [The presider] aids orphans and widows. In short, the presider is a guardian to all those who are in need.

The worship molecule – in worship we are looking for both human and divine elements – welcome, sitting together, known by name; presence of God, awe, joy, mystery. Often it's enough to think about these and do them well.

Worship is about communicating a common humanity in the presence of a holy God who himself became flesh.

4. The chores of grace? Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge

Occasional offices can be a core element of a parish mission strategy.

In 2003, over 80% of the adult population visited a church building – mostly to attend a baptism, funeral, wedding. Church weddings are now 32%. 21% of babies are still baptised.

Bob Jackson suggests one of the factors for growth in London is the lack of occasional offices which frees clergy up for mission. 20% say they left church damaged/disillusioned – often through contact with an occasional office.

Baptism – suggestions – a regular baptism service with attention paid to welcome; giving candles and suggesting prayers; a baptism visitor; Toddler church from baptism follow-up.

Weddings – attending the local wedding fayre; a wedding magazine; marriage preparation; using the service to involve those attending; a Valentine's service for those married in the preceding years.

Funerals – bereavement groups, All Souls / remembrance services.

5. Mission-shaped Isle of Dogs – Martin Seeley

A place of rapid social change – from white dockers' community to one which has the original community, new professionals, and a Bangladeshi community; with a doubled population. Sticking to the mass as the core of their common life. Learning to become representative by drawing newcomers in. Table fellowship – hosting dinner parties with representatives from the community to discuss issues in the community, then acting on the consensus.

6. Friendship, community and mission – Paul Bayes

A missionary church is relational. Honest friendship is one of the best facilitators of mission. People expect us to be friendly, and mind if we're not.

'And yet nothing in the last half-century – not the ordination of women, not faith in the City, not even Common Worship – *nothing* has proved as annoying as the Church's commitment to friendliness'...

Prophetic friendliness is what we're about; and it has to be real, and open to new people. Story of Joanne, coming to Alpha for the meal, not listening to the talks, asking questions in the pub afterwards, finding faith. The word 'friend' means 'free one' – it's not a preparation for asking them to join the cleaning rota..

The art of course friendship – short term projects and courses are normal in the world. Lent courses can have the same effect; a 6 week faith-project.

Natural networks and Ladies' Fellowships.

7. On being mission-shaped civic church: the view from Wimborne Minster – John Holbrook

A civic profile.

Offering short courses, quiet days, lectures, special liturgical opportunities through Lent and Advent, spirituality events such as vigils. Lifepath programme for children allowing the building to tell its story of faith. A special anniversary vow of commitment for a year- 400 did. Promoting trade justice.

Collective and small chapel worship settings. Using installations such as prayer trees, candles, stress pebbles, world maps etc to help visitors engage with the building at greater spiritual depth. Days of storytelling, anointing, confession, creativity in cathedrals.

8. The place of nurture within a mission-shaped Church – Tim Sledge

The nurture group – in the last 2 years 1/3 of churches have set one up. 2 million have attended them, 1/3 million have become Christians. Small groups bring renewal to the church.

Mistakes:

- Assuming people can come straight off them and find their place in the church family
- Failing to ask how faith makes a difference not just to the group but to the community

9. We can't go on meeting like this: shaping the structure of the local church for mission – Tim Sledge

PCCs... What are they like? What are they for?

Consulting together and with God.

A fourfold ministry brief: pastoral, evangelistic, social, ecumenical.

Not having too many meetings – team ministries show greater decline than single benefices.

The work of Springboard with PCCs – moving from issue → options → evaluation → decision → implementation → monitoring → solution.

The deanery synod – defined by a retired archdeacon as 'a group of Anglicans waiting to go home'..

10. Mission-shaped cathedrals – Mark Rylands

'The success story of the CofE in the late C20th'?

Chester – children experiencing the cathedral as a living building with a pilgrim theme, taking part in spiritual activities, often bringing their parents back to visit.

Exeter – children moving through the building touching a saint's grave and naming family members about whom they are concerned; singing; silence; hearing the story of Mary's offering of herself to God.

Wakefield – organising a 'Discovery' day, an audio tour involving places and artefacts to reflect on your own unique spiritual journey.

Exeter, a Saturday prayer day. No one came from the diocese. Visitors walked in and took part – visiting prayer stations and trying out different activities in each, praying with bubbles, quiet contemplation, placing a fish in a net with the name of a person to come to Christ, adding a stone to a cairn of hope while remembering those who carry heavy burdens; tying a ribbon on a prayer tree...Hundreds came, and it became an evangelistic activity.

Graham Cray: 'postmodern people are more likely to come to faith through experience... But one of the tragedies of today is that some elements of the Church are so firmly secularised in their disbelief of the supernatural that they have nothing to say to a culture which increasingly takes spirituality and the supernatural for granted', 127.

CofE has declined by over 15% in 15 years. Attendances at cathedral services have increased by 17% since 2000.

Excellence of worship? Sacred theatres? Religious railway stations offering different destinations? Anonymity? Civic links?

Manchester – bistro meals, trips up tower, art and craft displays, bell ringing demos, short services, showings of Miracle Maker, and an invitation Sunday.

Afterword

Our primary calling, however, is to receive rather than to give. Let's keep doing it...

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