

2. Theology

Some key theological principles

As a result of the encouraging consultation process with the Churches of Brighton and Hove some key principles have emerged. We offer these as a contribution to help us all reflect on the review process and to discern what God is asking of us. We have given particular attention to collaborative ministry to attempt to respond to some of the questions that emerged from the consultation process.

The following points are a summary of what is explored more fully in the ensuing text:

1. Discerning God's will is both a joy and a struggle.
2. Key to that discernment is the sacrificial servant-hood of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2, especially vv. 6-7⁸). In Christ, sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, God seeks to draw the whole of creation into a healed and reconciled relationship with Him.
3. The Church's mission is summarised in both our Lord's Great Commandment – Mt 22.37-40⁹ – and Great Commission – Mt 28.19-20¹⁰ – as agent of God's coming Kingdom, in which God's purposes are fulfilled. A key aspect of this is the building up of Eucharistic, worshipping, serving and witnessing communities as signs of Christ's presence in the world, and as a foretaste of the Kingdom.
4. For effective mission, the development of collaborative approaches to ministry (collaborative means 'co-labouring') which enable us to work together more effectively are essential – both within parishes and between them, even though there may be different ways of doing this in different localities.
5. The term 'collaborative ministry' is fundamentally about a mindset and relationships, and does not refer to or imply any one structure for the organisation of the Church.

⁸ Christ Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

⁹ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

¹⁰ "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Exploring these principles in greater depth

1 Discerning God's will

God's will is both a joy and a struggle. This should not surprise us as our faith is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The distinctively Christian affirmation of God as Trinity, often referred to in writing about the Church and its ministry (especially collaborative ministry), is built on Christ-shaped foundations. This is because Trinitarian belief originated in the realization that the person and action of Christ revealed the very presence and action of God.

2 The sacrificial servant-hood of Jesus Christ

The sacrificial servant-hood of Jesus Christ 'did not regard equality with God a thing to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of servant' (Philippians 2.6-7). Philippians 2 speaks about the self-emptying and costly sacrifice the Son embraced in order that the whole of creation be drawn into a healed and reconciled relationship with God. As Christ reveals the nature of God, so He reveals God's purpose for the Church. The Church most closely reflects the nature of God when it is able in its turn to be sacrificial in the service of God and neighbour. In this interim time between Christ's first proclamation of the Kingdom and God's promised future, the Church is guided by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, who enables both faithfulness to our inheritance of faith and the embodying of that faith in new contexts and situations.

3 The Church's mission

All this is central for an understanding of mission. The root meaning of mission is 'sent' or 'sending'. Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God, and in turn sent out his disciples (John 20.21¹¹). The Church could not know about the nature of God, nor would it exist at all, if the Father had not sent the Son, in the power of the Spirit. But having been called forth by the Trinitarian God, the Church is now an agent of God's mission, sent to preach and embody the good news of Christ, and the Kingdom of God he proclaimed. The mission of the Church, therefore, is both begun and sustained through participation in the life of the Holy Trinity. This participation is most fully experienced in our Eucharistic worship, from which we are sent out to 'love and serve the Lord' – c.f. Acts 2.46-47¹². There is a need, therefore, to affirm and build up Eucharistic communities as signs of Christ's presence in, and purpose for, the world. In providing places of hospitality and healing, such communities are a foretaste of the Kingdom Christ proclaimed.

For the Church in Brighton and Hove it is a joy and privilege to participate in God's mission, but nonetheless a struggle because embodying the love of God in a fractured

¹¹ "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'"

¹² "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

2 – Theology

world was not easy for Christ and his disciples and is not easy for his followers today. Nevertheless, it is our calling under God to work together in Brighton and Hove ...

- “to proclaim of the Good News of the Kingdom;
- to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- to respond to human need by loving service;
- to seek to transform the unjust structures of society;
- and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”¹³

For participating in mission, parts of the Body of Christ are gifted differently – c.f. Rom 12.4-5¹⁴. The humility to be servants of each other, sharing our gifts, will be part of the pilgrimage to the wholeness of the Kingdom of which the sign on earth is our communion together. This communion in Christ is an abiding with him as branches of the same vine (John 15)¹⁵, sharing his life and work in a sacrificial way for the sake of the world.

4 The development of collaborative approaches

The sharing and exercising of gifts central to descriptions of the Body of Christ in the New Testament are at the heart of what, in the contemporary Church, is often termed ‘collaborative ministry’ (see Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4). The word collaborative means co-labouring: working together. That the ministry of the Church should be understood as corporate and not individualistic is implicit not only in the image of the Body of Christ, but also in its origin in the Trinitarian life of God, and in other words and phrases which describe the Church in the New Testament (such as vine, holy people, and temple of living stones).

We have said that the Church’s purpose is to be an agent of God’s mission, sent to preach and embody the good news of Christ, and the Kingdom of God he proclaimed. All ministry exists to help this happen. Gifts for ministry are given by Christ through the power of the Spirit and therefore have their root in God. Whenever the New Testament speaks of such gifts they are clearly set in the context of the divine life which is their source, for example, ‘To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit.’ (1 Corinthians 12.8-9)

The whole people of God is called to share in this ministry of Christ. All are necessary for the fulfilment of Christ’s mission and all are gifted to participate in it. This is what we mean by the term collaborative ministry – clergy and laity working together.

¹³ The Five Marks of Mission from the 1988 Lambeth Conference

¹⁴ “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

¹⁵ c.f. John 15.5 – “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

5 The term ‘collaborative ministry’

The term collaborative ministry does not refer to or imply any one structure for the organisation of the Church. A variety of different structures will and have been used to attempt to attain the goal. Whatever the structures, it is important that they serve and enable collaborative ministry.

We have identified in the chapter on Collaborative Ministry what we consider to be some of the most important principles.