

Our understanding of Mission

As we plan for the next 5 years, we have produced a Vision Document and 5 year action plan. To help keep these documents as streamlined as possible, we have created this document which sets out full explanation of our understanding of Mission. These principles were established in 2018 and have been adopted by the Kirk Session, Mission Development Worker and Outreach Team.

5 PICTURES THAT EXPLAIN OUR THINKING

ICEBERG -Defining "Mission"



What we see of icebergs above water is only a small part. That's why we've got the phrase 'the tip of the iceberg'. Mission isn't all we do as a church but it is the most visible part.

As we talk about mission, it is important that we define what we mean. To be "missional" is a buzz word today. In this use, mission is often portrayed as the most prominent characteristic of church but left ill-defined.

"Mission" isn't a bible word but it is an important word. The Latin root of the word means "to be sent".

What we mean by mission is what we are sent to do by Jesus in the world.

The simplest bible answer for this is the Great Commission: *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'* (Matt 28:18-20)

In the other documents that we have produced, making disciples is all of what our church ministry, mission and administration are about. By mission, we mean the outward-facing part of making disciples.

In this sense, it is the tip of the iceberg. It is not all we do- and most importantly- it is not disconnected from our doctrine, worship and practice. **Mission is the small visible part of the church's work, seen by those outside, but which is connected to all the other things we do as a church.**

Today, many seem to want to lead the church in pragmatic panic. In the panic, the aim is to keep trying things until we get people through the doors or save the institution of the church. In this, mission is like a switch we turn on and off, or a crisis mode we adapt. In this of thinking, it can only be radical, about making change and urgent. There are times to do these things but they are not our driving convictions. Being faithful to God and fruitful in our day is most important to us and any change or urgency comes from obedience to Christ. Therefore, is a natural part of what we've always been about. In mission we want to go with courage, to share the historic Christian gospel in a relevant way to our community. We do this because Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth has sent us, and promises to be with us.

NC 500 – Keeping Mission Simple



A second image helpful image is of the North coast 500. In recent years the North Coast 500 has become a massive tourist attraction for the North Highlands. The NC 500 is the road that travels from Inverness up the A9, through the county, along the North Coast and down the West back to Inverness, via Wester Ross.

The success of this road is strange to us who live on it. To us, it's always been there.

The success has come because someone (the tourist board, the government or whoever) have stuck up some signs to point people to the amazing countryside in the North of Scotland. We always knew how beautiful and breath-taking this road has been but now many people get to enjoy it.

When we talk about mission in the church it is very easy to make it very complicated, very quickly. But in reality, it's quite simple. All we're doing is pointing people to Jesus, the one we know, love, worship and serve. He is there and what he has done through his life, death and resurrection are there for all to see, explore and come and respond to, as we have done. Our job as a church in mission is to put up the signs and point people to Jesus.

Our driving motivation as a church in mission is simple: We want people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus and join us in being disciples and grow with us as we all seek to be conformed to his likeness.

Our driving motivation is not to fill a church, save an institution, or fill the gaps in our organisation. However, we believe that these may come as our mission is continued.

BUILDING BRIDGES –A challenge we face



The question for us in mission is: “How to best share Jesus with our community today?”

In our lifetimes the world has changed a lot. This is true in lots of things: The technology we use today was unimaginable even 20 years ago (the iPhone is only 14 years old!). The advancement of medicine over the last 100 years has been astounding. The quality of life we have compared to our

parents or grandparents is much higher.

There have also been other big changes in our lifetimes in terms of the way people think about some of the big questions of life including the place of faith and God. There is lots we could say about this but really, what matters for now is that the long and the short of it is that there is now a difference which wasn't necessarily true 50 or 60 years ago.

The difference is that there is a wide (and widening) gap between how most people understand and make sense of life, and what you might call the “Christian Worldview”.

So, for us, the task of sharing Jesus seems much harder. While this is true, we must also realise that it has never been easy. The bible tells us that because of our sinful nature, we are all naturally blind to the things of God.

An added dimension to this challenge is that in the same time period, our denomination, the Church of Scotland has been slowly moving away from its moorings of doctrine. As a church who seeks to be faithful to God, we have prized holding fast to historic biblical doctrine and our reformed understanding of Christianity. As we have sought to hold fast, this has sometimes exacerbated the gap between us and our community around us. The answer to these developments is neither to join with the denomination and slip our moorings, or follow the change our views in line with the world. Instead, we should build bridges between a faithful understanding of historic Christianity and today's world.

We need to find ways to build bridges with the people we want to share Jesus within our community.

STEPPING STONES – Our main response to the challenge



The question then is, what can we do to achieve this?

For that, we have our fourth image. Stepping stones. When Andrew visited a number of congregations throughout the Highlands in 2018, he noticed that one of the most effective ways that churches had found to help bridge the gap was to put on “stepping stone” events. While they may look very different, there were some key characteristics:

1. The event addressed implicitly or explicitly some misconception of, or objection to, the Christian faith.
2. The event provided some form of proclamation or investigation of the message of Christianity, usually in a softer, simpler way.
3. The event was somewhere the congregation could bring non-Christian friends or family confidently, knowing that it was designed to be helpful and friendly to people out with the faith.
4. These events were somewhere for relationships to grow between Christians and non-Christians, so that the goodness of Christ in their life might be seen naturally.

Our hope is that we will continue to hold a spine of stepping stone events throughout the year, which will allow folks to take one step closer to Jesus. There will necessarily need to be a mixture of events, aimed at different ages or backgrounds or groups within our parish.

There should also be a variety of levels of presentation of the gospel message at different events. A phrase Rob uses to help express this is: “Evangelical Pressure Scale”

Some events will be repeated, others will be a one off.

From these events, we hope that genuine relationships grow and that these will provide space for our congregation to listen and care for others. We also hope that folks will be able to hear the gospel in a relevant, sensitive and powerful way.

HARBOUR – An image for our church going forward



The Harbour was the initial reason for our part of our parish and the reason Pulteneytown Church was built. Over the years the harbour has known ups and downs in fortunes: From the heights of the high days of the herring fishing came lows and decline in the community. However, there has always been some work for people here related to the sea. Recently we have seen the exciting regeneration of the harbour with the new windfarm technologies and the Beatrice Office.

What we can learn from this is that the harbour has had to evolve over the years. While history is important, there needed to be fresh life and innovation to make the harbour useful today. When it hasn't had this, the harbour has struggled.

As a church, we need to evolve to share Jesus with our community today.

Our first step has been the prayerful consideration of our task, leading to the appointment of a Mission Development Worker to work with the Minister and Kirk Session, to lead our Mission Work.

Our next step has been to establish a spine of "stepping stone" events in our church life. We expect that over the next 5 years, we will keep a spine of stepping stone events as a constant within church life. Our hope is to develop real relationships and provide space for Christ to be shared and known.

We hope that there will be further evolution as this work grows, under the leadership of our Mission Development Worker. We suggest some steps we hope to take in the next 5 years in the 5 Year Plan. However, as with everything, we want to open to God's leading in this.

The other important aspect of the image is that the harbour is still a harbour. It still involves being a place for boats to land, even if the boats and workers are different than they used to be.

We are a church. A community of disciples of Jesus who are called to follow Him and to live as he commands. This involves being faithful and obedient to His Word, living as salt and light and sharing the gospel with our community. We cannot change from that. That is who God has called us to be and who we delight in being. However, what we're trying to do is to evolve so that new generations can come and be disciples of Jesus too, saved from a lost eternity and come and know the new life that God offers in Jesus. That means that while we don't want to get caught up in the pragmatic panic as identified earlier, we will be willing to move and change aspects of church life to help us evolve and best carry out the mission God has given us today.