

CO-VICARS VISION TALK (Abbreviated Version)

Tonight, as Co-Vicars we want to communicate with you, our 'vision' for St George's.

This is very much a vision of collaboration because it rises out of the collective energy, spirit and wisdom of this community, of which of course, both Gareth and I have been shaped and formed.

It's a vision for the next 3 years and it captures our convictions and aspirations of what it means to 'be' and 'do' church in today's climate. We'd like to share the initiatives and strategies we've *already* set into motion - and those we will *need* to set into motion - in order to breathe life and enable this vision.

But first, let's be sure of what we mean by the word vision. Because for Christians, there is the **mission** and the **vision**.

The mission for every single church, never changes, because Jesus gave it to us.

"Go out and make disciples of all nations and be kingdom salt and light in the world"

A saying we've used often, that captures the basic theology of what it means to be God's church is this... *"It's not the church of God that has a mission in the world, it is the God of mission that has a church in the world."*

As God's Church, we are the privileged participants in God's mission to restore, reconcile and redeem all that is lost and broken in God's world. We do this by preaching the gospel and living in such a Christ-like way, that people are intrigued and attracted to want to be part of this transforming mission of God and will want to 'know Christ'

THIS IS THE MISSION OF EVERY CHURCH

THE VISION FOR EACH CHURCH IS DIFFERENT.

The vision is about HOW we intend to communicate and embody this God given mission and for every church this will be different. It will depend among other things, on the context of your surrounding community. But for all churches in NZ and many in the West, there is now one common core context we all share.

The landscape in which we attempt to do this mission that Jesus gave us, is getting more and more challenging.

Not only are the younger generation NOT feeling the need to explore their spiritual yearnings and passions through Christianity, but also many of those who grew up in church are leaving quietly out the back door. All of us probably know someone who has quietly slipped away from faith and church.

This is the core context for any church forming a vision.

Because any vision we have, has to be firmly based in the reality of meeting this challenge.

If we do not understand the challenge we are attempting to meet, we could have a vision to climb the wrong mountain.

So from the very first day that Gareth and I were given the privilege of leading this great community, we have set about grasping the fullness of this challenge, in order to form a vision of how to meet this challenge.

This is an ongoing process that needs continuous prayer and collective discernment but visionary leadership essentially boils down to this:

We are 'HERE' and we want to get to 'THERE'.

And you cannot get to 'there' overnight so we break it down into strategic steps of attainable goals.

In a paragraph, our big picture vision for this wonderful St George's community is this...

- We want to be a place of grace.
- An authentic worshipping community where everyone is valued and empowered to be the person God intended them to be. A life-affirming, life-enhancing community growing deeper in our relationship and formation in Jesus Christ.
- We want to reach out to those who no longer reach out to church and connect with those who currently do not connect with Church. To be an outward focussing church ... creating pathways into the community we are privileged to serve.
 - Above all we want to **'dare greatly'** to find new ways to meet the challenges of being church in today's climate.

What we'd like to do for the next few minutes, is to capture what we've done so far in our first eleven months and **why** we've done it. We believe all of these initiatives and strategies (small and big) have laid down the crucial building blocks that enables us to move to the next stage in our journey. A firm foundation on which to meet this challenge of being church in today's climate.

The first thing we wanted to do was to ensure that all of our sermon series in some way spoke into forming a vision for meeting this challenge for all churches. We called our very first sermon series 'Your Kingdom Come' ... and we asked the 3 basic questions relevant to having an effective vision.

- WHY are we here as Church?
- WHAT are the challenges in the current climate?
- HOW do we meet this challenge? This is the vision part of the equation.

We not only explored this across the whole church - we explored this in depth at our Staff and Vestry Away Days and we did this for 2 very good reasons.

1. Firstly, core to our big picture vision, is to be a leadership of collaboration.

The whole body of Christ enabled and empowered to meet this God given challenge. if we are to achieve this aspiration of collaboration, it's vital that we ALL understand the challenges. We cannot lead collaboratively, if we're on a different page.

2. Secondly, we wanted to encourage all of us, to think about the challenges, so that with a greater understanding, we can all feel empowered, encouraged and equipped to meet it.

The other important dimension to this vision of collaboration across the church is that as Co -Vicars we need to model it. Our constant refrain has been for all of us to see our **'diversity as a gift and not a threat'** and that applies to us too. We have worked hard to make this a partnership that is servant hearted to this community and each other. In short, prioritising leadership that is collaborative and healthy is core to being able to meet the Vision over the next three years.

Our next two sermon series were chosen to speak into this challenge of being a people equipped and confident to proclaim our faith. In **'Streams of Living Water'** we opened our hearts to the full scope and beauty of what it means to reflect Christ as we explored all the ancient Christian traditions. One of the weaknesses that can limit the church's effectiveness, has been to have a narrow approach to our own faith and formation in Christ. At times, Christianity has sometimes emphasised one of these Traditions at the expense of the others. Jesus shows us what it means to embody them all, and calls us to do the same.

In **'Being the Body'** we focused on the teaching of St Paul, asking questions of how we can be a church community actively involved in 'being Christ in our everyday situations beyond just a Sunday 'event'.

"The Network Course", which saw twenty people attending, began a journey of discovering - some for the first time, their God-given passions, gifts and styles and how they might be put to work for God's ultimate purposes.

As part of our desire to be a nurturing life-affirming community, we then embarked on the mammoth BIG PHONE AROUND – A commitment to phone very person on the contact list in this community. We figured the best way to know the pastoral needs of our community was to ask you. This has enabled us to work out strategies of how we can fulfil our vision of being a church in which every member feels affirmed and valued. The formation of our pastoral care teams, alongside Stan and Angela, together with our home-group focus is part of what it means to be a gracious and caring church.

All of these initiatives are the crucial building blocks providing a firm foundation in which to move to the next stage of our journey. The most repeated words of encouragement we have received (from long standing members and new comers) ... is that this church has a real sense of warmth and vibrancy. It feels life-giving and life-enhancing. For us this is the hallmark of God's presence. We are here to be a worshipping community of the Living God. The giver of LIFE. This encourages us to believe we are on the right track.

CREATING PATHWAYS INTO OUR COMMUNITY – NEW WAYS OF ENGAGING

YOUTH - Youth as a Vision priority is a no brainer. But in terms of today's changing landscape and HOW we meet the challenge, what does this look like? Lynette, Jax and Oscar, with the help of a fantastic group of volunteers, have already been doing a great job of attending to this. But alongside this important work, we recognise a need to not only nurture the young people who are already part of us, but also create pathways so that young people in our wider community might have the opportunity to engage with Christ. It seems apparent that if we are to do this, we need to resource a flexible role – that can not only disciple and mentor our young people, but has an outward-focused, missional focus that is as much about connecting with young people in the community. We are going through a process of exploring some possibilities for this role and hope to update you soon on our progress.

WEBSITE - The website is now the main shop-window for any church. We are completely aware that our website needs an overhaul. With this in mind, we've engaged in a voluntary capacity one of our congregation - a recent computer science grad, who will meet with us each week to identify areas for improvement. We look forward to some immediate improvements being made.

IN CONCLUSION

There is already much to celebrate at St G's as an outward focussed church, creating pathways in to our community.

- ESOL and ESOL Bible study
- Mainly Music
- Alpha Marriage and The Alpha Course
- Third Space

As we move forward, we will continue to support these expressions of outreach through prayer, friendship and discipleship, as well as finding more people to resource these ministries.

For each of us the main challenge is understand that we already have networks of relationships in places of work, school, neighbourhood, that are avenues for the grace of God to be at work. It's why Gareth is at Dilworth School, helping young students engage in questions of faith. Each of us will have our own spheres of influence, and we commend these as opportunities for creating pathways with people in our community.

We have both been touched deeply by this man Jesus Christ in our lives. And we both share a co-passion and co-vision for the future. Core to our vision is that we believe passionately in the intrinsic dignity, worth and value of every human being made in God's image.

We finish by re-affirming our commitment to be an authentic worshipping community where everyone is valued and empowered to be the person God intended them to be. A life-affirming, life-enhancing community growing deeper in our relationship and formation in Jesus Christ.

Let us all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, **reach out to those who no longer reach out to church and connect with those who currently do not connect with Church.** Let us be an outward focussed church creating pathways into the community we are privileged to serve. Let us 'dare greatly' – take risks – be creative - and find new ways to meet the challenges of being church in today's climate.