

MAKING YOUR APCM/AGM MISSIONAL

As part of our 2017 Webinar of Spring Mission Ideas Rural Mission Solutions suggested taking a fresh look at your Annual General Meeting or Annual Parochial Church Meeting so that you could use this as an opportunity to reflect on the missional life of your church. We provided six headings:

Why are you here?
How well have you done?
Appraisals
What could you do
What will you do
Using all God's gifts

Why are we here?

This simple question can cause some disturbance. All too often, those attending our churches see worship as the main purpose for the existence of church. I have often heard people answer the question by quoting the answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Unfortunately, they stop at the first question, when the second question of the Catechism points us to obedience to all things from Scripture. As we are reminded in *Mission-Shaped Church* 'It is not the Church of God that has a mission to the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world.' The God who loves us loves the whole world and has missional purpose, in which he calls us to share, just as he did his first disciples.

But we need to remember that mission is not only about evangelism. Why not prepare for your meeting some sheets with the *Five Marks of Mission* set out but leave some space between each one. To remind you, these are:

- To proclaim 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 unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Does your church have a Mission Statement? If it does then you should ensure that it is printed out at the top of your meeting agenda. If you do not already have a Mission Statement, then this is something you could spend some time trying to formulate, though possibly not at your APCM or AGM. An example of a Mission Statement might be "As a Christian Church, St Christopher's Church Puddlewick exists to honour God and follow Christ through sharing the Good News and through acts of loving service within and beyond the local community". Remember it needs to be concise.

How well are we doing?

There is no point in having a Mission Statement – or an awareness of our call to mission, if we do not ask this question. Just to be provocative I sometimes ask congregations, "Jesus would like to know how you are getting on with the task he set you?"

If you have set out the Mission Statement and/or the Five Marks of Mission, those present could use the spaces between to write any examples of what the church has done in the past twelve months towards these aims. Depending on how many are attending, this could be done in groups of two or three (mix up those in the same family).

Appraisals

Two common mistakes of rural churches are (a) assuming they understand the nature of their community perfectly, and (b) that the members of the community understand and value the Church. One church I worked with were shocked to discover that most people in their village thought the church was boring and irrelevant! It was a wakeup call, and their response led to sudden and marked growth in attendances.

Rural Mission Solutions can provide guidance and help with church and community appraisals. Usually, these are best undertaken by someone from outside both the church and the local community.

APCMs and AGMs are ideal times to get feedback on appraisals or make a commitment to undertake one.

What could you do?

Please note that this is different from the next question. This is intended to be an exercise for generating as many ideas as possible. You need to explain that carefully. People should be encouraged to generate any ideas that they think could meet the mission objectives. These could be crazy off-the-wall ideas. **Do not be limited by what you think you could manage.** Get everyone thinking and talking. You could use small groups of two or three people and give them five minutes to buzz. You should provide them with paper to capture their ideas (possibly the papers like those you used earlier). In a feedback session afterwards, capture all ideas on a flipchart and put it on display for all to see and read. **Keep emphasising that all ideas are welcome and do not allow anyone to comment negatively on someone's suggestions.**

What will you do?

From the list of suggestions could you identify a few things that you might be able to manage in the coming twelve months? Take care not to over-commit the church. It is better to do a few things well rather than a lot of things poorly. You might want to prioritise those you choose. Do at least choose one action.

We remind you of Kipling's six honest serving men who taught him all he knew. Their names were What and Why and When, and How and Where and Who. A good idea needs to be implemented carefully. You might need to appoint a strategy group from the Meeting. Do not leave it to one person, and certainly not the Minister or Vicar. While delegating responsibility, be clear on what autonomy you are delegating, and make sure that there is a plan for accountability – at least a date by which they will come back with a detailed plan.

Using all God's gifts

Churches are usually good at determining roles and then trying to find people to undertake them. This is a poor management plan. Why not use some of the time available to identify the people skills and gifts and then find ways that exploit those for the good of the life and work of the church? For example, you might have some people who are brilliant at hospitality. They love entertaining visitors at home. If so, why not use them as the hospitality team that welcomes people to church and looks after them. One person told me that a man who should have been on duty as a sidesperson was unable to attend but asked his visiting adult daughter to stand in for him. Everyone commented after the service how good they felt and what an excellent welcome they had received. It turned out she worked for an airline as a member of cabin crew!

Remember, God uses our personalities, and life experiences as well as our gifts.

In Conclusion

The above are only suggestions. Just ensure that your APCM/AGM is not business as usual, but part of being missional.