

## **Introduction – Why a Tailored Mission Strategy**

While this process has been developed with smaller churches in the UK in mind it will be found to have relevance for larger churches and in other cultural settings. It is essentially a flexible process rather than a fixed programme. These notes are offered to provide guidance and will prove helpful. However, in order to gain the fullest possible advantage it is the underlying theological and organisational principles that need to be understood and followed prayerfully.

There are many mission strategies, programmes and packages available to Christians and churches. Some of these contain set patterns that have been proved to be effective, and are therefore commendable. I liken them to the experience of purchasing clothes in a large store. What is on offer may be well made and intelligently designed. There will also be choice in style, material, and colour. If we take our time we might be able to find just what we want. With any luck it will be a reasonable fit, made from the material we want, and with the right look. We will wear it with confidence.

But if we could afford to put ourselves into the hands of a bespoke tailor the experience will be different. Care will be taken to understand the customer. Many measurements will be taken to ensure an absolutely perfect fit. Careful discussion will take the customer through samples of materials and a range of patterns. Later, when the item is being made, there will be a fitting. At this point further adjustments are made and the customer is consulted as to his/her opinion on the style and fit. The finished garment will fit perfectly in all places. It will be worn with confidence and possibly some pride. What is also interesting is that throughout the process the tailor and the customer work as a team.

Off-the-peg mission strategies are usually great but rarely fit perfectly throughout a church. The concept of developing a tailored mission strategy is a process in which the whole church can share in determining just the right fit and style for who they are and where they are. To achieve this the same degree of expertise and care is needed as a bespoke tailor employs. It involves careful consideration and consultation. The end result should be a strategies and activities that the whole church finds comfortable and in which they can all engage in confidence.

### **Sharing in God's Mission**

Mission is essentially about purpose. For churches, our understanding of mission has to start with our understanding of God. The God in whom Christians believe is a God with a mission. He is not remote and uncaring about his creation. From the creation narrative in scripture we see God acting upon the earth in a situation where there is chaos. Into this he systematically brings order. The final act of creation is humankind. Genesis 1:27-29 sets out God's purpose in this stage in his creation. God has a purpose in creation, and Adam and Eve were to play a part in that purpose. In Genesis chapter two we see that Eve was created for a specific purpose: to be a suitable helper/companion to Adam.

But this glimpse of a creative God is but the first indication of purpose. We see it in the account of Noah's life. We see it in God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We see it in his relationship with the people of Israel and in their redemption from Egypt under Moses. We hear it in the words of the Old Testament prophets and begin to catch a glimpse of the coming kingdom of God. But we see it supremely in the life of Jesus – God incarnate. His coming into the world was for

a reason which he demonstrated throughout his life, through his submission to the cross, and through his resurrection.

As part of the unveiling of his purposes Jesus called certain people to be his closest followers. These he later called 'apostles', which means someone sent on behalf of another (similar to an ambassador in our culture). The title does not define status; it defines purpose. They shared in his work and acted on his behalf during his life on earth. Before his departure from earth Jesus made clear that they were to continue his work in his name.

Through succeeding generations the responsibility to share in God's mission has been passed on. Being called to be a follower of Jesus carries also the sense of being called to share in his mission.

### **Diversity in mission**

The twelve men whom Jesus called to be his closest partners in mission were all individuals. Some were related and would have filial similarities. Some had similar jobs before being called to be his disciples. Clearly some had differing political views. They appear to have come from slightly different social backgrounds. They certainly had different personalities. Jesus put together a team that was diverse.

As the team continued the mission after the ascension they discovered that it was something much more than they had envisaged. God was calling Gentiles as well as Jews. This must have been something of a theological shock. Peter's introduction to this took place while he was at Joppa and was given a vision to prepare him for the call to visit Cornelius' home. As the Church was scattered through persecution diversity was expressed. The church at Antioch in Syria was drawn from various countries. And it was from here that Paul and Barnabas were called to share in God's mission for the wider world.

Later, Paul wrote to a church established through mission at Corinth (a cosmopolitan and diverse community). In 1Corinthians chapter 12 Paul addresses the topic of unity in diversity. He uses the illustration of a body made up of many and different parts, yet a single organism. In this passage he stresses that not every believer is the same, but that God has got a specific purpose for each believer for the benefit of the whole.

A local church is therefore a community of people who are diverse with each one being called and equipped for the purposes of God. Mission is not just about special events. The purpose God has for each believer should be being worked out in our everyday lives, whether that has to do with service internal to the life of the church or service from the church into the wider community. But just as the parts of our body work interactively and interdependently, so within the life of a local church there should be intelligent interaction and interdependence if our diverse ministries are to be fully effective.

Furthermore, it can be argued that if God has specific purposes for each believer then the local church, comprised of these diverse, purposely designed and placed ministries, must also have an organic specificity in God's mission. Just as, in Paul's teaching, different parts of the body should not compare themselves unhelpfully with others, so it is important that each church discovers how to operate in God's purposes for which they, as a church, are intelligently designed.

If we understand the nature and shape of the 'body' we should be able to tailor mission strategies that fit and suit it.

## **Facilitating the process**

When the concept of Tailored Mission Strategies was first developed I was able to act as the facilitator. I did this first in an applied way for an Anglican Benefice planning outreach. Not long afterwards I was able to put the principles into practice within a small declining rural church facing a crisis. In both cases I was able to act as facilitator drawing on theological training, business management experience and gifts as a teacher. The key was to facilitate a process that aimed at maximising participation and was enjoyable. We took the process gently. The outcome in both cases was encouraging. The Anglican outreach was amazingly successful. The declining church moved into significant growth and effectiveness in mission that proved sustainable.

The purpose of these notes is to enable others to act in this role. It might be that someone within the local church has appropriate abilities. Or you might find someone who is appropriate from a neighbouring church, or within your denomination. Failing that you can always contact Rural Mission Solutions and we will endeavour to find someone who will work with you.

The ideal facilitator needs to be empathetic in nature. The process has to be interactive and developmental. The facilitator needs to be able to sense what is happening with the people in the process, and wise enough to set an appropriate pace and/or make adjustments.

The ideal facilitator needs to be a proven and effective teacher. That is, someone who helps people to learn (not someone who likes the sound of their own voice!). A good teacher teaches because they enjoy the experience of seeing those moments of discovery that expand the mind and excite the spirit of the learner.

The facilitator does not need to be one person on his/her own. It can be done as a small team working as one.

The process includes reflection on scriptures and organisational development. This implies that some level of biblical understanding would be useful. It also implies that someone with people-management skills would be helpful. It is uncommon for one person to have all these skills so team work might well be the answer.

## **The format**

For the process to be effective and lead to sustainable outcomes it is important to get as many people as possible from your core congregation taking part. So who do you normally or quite often see at your main services? Ideally you should aim at getting 100% of your core congregation involved in the process and doing it together, rather than as separate individuals or separate groups such as home groups. If the percentage of those involved falls below 60% it will be hard to get sufficient "ownership" of the outcomes.

I prefer to work with churches through "Away Days". You can go through the process on church premises but it seems that going somewhere else, not too far away, and a pleasant environment is better. However, thought has to be given for transport, accessibility for any that might be disabled, child care, and food. For example, to be sure that you get the parents with young children you will need to organise an appropriate programme with appropriate leaders to run a programme at the same time in a different part of the building or in another building nearby. As to food, you could organise this on a "bring and share" basis or use outside caterers. Whatever you choose you need to ensure that people you want to be participating in the process do not end up in the kitchen. The

best solution to these situations is to ask friends from neighbouring churches to provide the practical support so all your people work through the process in an uninterrupted way as a group.

There are a number of separate steps in the process which I will set out below. Some of these could be combined into a single Away Day. But you are likely to need two or three sessions. You should certainly plan for two as a minimum. I suggest that they should not be more than one month apart. If they are enjoyable and work well there will be a natural readiness to have more.

An alternative format would be to arrange a series of shorter but more regular sessions. But the problem then arises about maximising attendance. One solution to this approach would be to use Sundays. This would work well, for example, if you were able to have a shared lunch after the morning service, and follow this with a session lasting not more than 90 minutes. Pacing the process is crucial. If the sessions are too far apart there will be discontinuity. If you try to squeeze too much into a session there will be too many fresh issues to grasp. A little and often works well. **At the end of the day, plan to do what will workable.**

### The Steps

Step One	What is mission?
Step Two	Good news to share
Step Three	“Know yourself!”
Step Four	Looking around
Step Five	Facing up to change
Step Six	You have great ideas!
Step Seven	Making it work sustainably