

# Mission Statement

The mission of All Saints Ecclesall is to grow the church,  
both in quality and quantity,  
so that all the people of our parish, and beyond,  
may encounter the love of God.

## Commentary and Explanation

Mission statements, when wisely handled, can be a valuable exercise in both forming and sustaining a sense of purpose in any organisation. Hence the very act of creating a mission statement is valuable in that it forces the organisation to articulate the very core of its purpose. Additionally, a mission statement can be used as a means to keep that organisation on track; keeping its primary purpose clear and focussed and stopping it being misdirected.

Arguably, Jesus himself had a mission statement. The story in Luke's Gospel 4:16-30 but particularly 18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2) exercises a clear sense of purpose and intent for Jesus in that Gospel and is sometimes called the Nazareth manifesto.<sup>1</sup>

He (Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The themes of the Spirit's presence, divine bias to the poor and liberation at all levels of human oppression (both for Jews and Gentiles) in fulfilment of the ancient Jubilee laws and Christological disclosure and rejection continue throughout Luke's Gospel and beyond into its companion writing – The Acts of the Apostles.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to trace these theological strands throughout Luke's writings and therefore it is theological legitimate to claim that in this tradition Jesus not only states his core intentions but uses this Mission Statement to shape his ministry and that of those who followed after him.

Growth is the central theme of the Mission Statement. It is Biblical in that it takes up a theme that threads its way throughout the New Testament. Hence the imagery is used in Jesus' parables concerning the sower (Mk 4:8) the mustard seed (Matt 13:32) and the lilies of the field (Matt 6:28). Both the *αυξανω* / *auxano* (grow, cause to grow, increase) and

<sup>1</sup> Rowland, C, "Scripture: New Testament" (Scott P. & Cavanaugh W. (ed.) The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.29

<sup>2</sup> Yoder J. The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p.34

πλεονάζω /pleonazo (to be or become more or great, to increase) word groups express more than one understanding of growth, “The thought here is not solely of numerical increase, but also of maturity”<sup>3</sup> The treatment of this theme carefully seeks to strike a balance between numerical and qualitative understandings of growth, recognising that both are necessary in order to do justice to the New Testament.

Additionally, the following points need to be made:

- ♦ A Mission Statement needs to be short, pithy and memorable. If it can't be easily recalled by those who belong to the organisation in question, it is likely that it is anaemic, irrelevant and quite useless.
- ♦ Mission Statements are not to be confused with Creeds or other expressions of faith. It is easy to find fault with any Mission Statement if certain cherished emphases are absent. Hence a Mission Statement can easily be stretched and disembowelled by additional clauses.

This mission statement is offered to the PCC for consideration. It is only thirty-two words long. Much could be added, but that would simply lengthen it. The following points hopefully unpack its meaning and potential for development.

1. Growth may be considered politically incorrect or “business talk” in some quarters, but it has a profound Biblical basis. Having a positive attitude towards growth has enormous potential for helping to shape a church's consciousness and culture.
2. The stress on growing the church will not please all theologians. However, it is included for the clear and unambiguous reason that unless churches grow in England the statistical predictions of the virtual collapse of the church in his century will be fulfilled. Whilst not all churches are in a context in which growth is likely – there being some areas of England where for sociological and other factors the gospel seems to make little headway – there is an expectation that growth should be the normal experience of a church focussed on the gospel.
3. The emphasis upon quality will cover the very important issues covered in the PCC's vision statement. This desire to emphasise the importance of prayer, Bible study, worship, unity etc is all part of this. If the church is not a place where Christians are growing in their faith, it is highly unlikely that it will attract others looking for faith. A people who are still earnestly on a spiritual journey are far more likely to attract seekers and searchers than a community that thinks that it has already arrived.
4. The issue of quantity cannot be ignored. Numbers do matter. A church which is growing in numbers has many advantages. It will almost certainly be one in which there is a high level of expectation of a God who is close to his people, touching them through ministry and prayer. A growing church is one which can develop resources; it can identify and release the gifts and talents that arise from within its new members. A growing church is also far better placed to face financial challenges – indeed a growing church is in a good place to increase giving and thereby enable further growth. This creates a spiral of growth.
5. There is a clear emphasis upon the parish. This fits in with the long established culture of All Saints as being primarily a local church. Without being legalistic about parish boundaries, it sets out the principle that the church has been given a parish as a primary zone of responsibility – both pastorally and evangelistically. The use of the term parish also infers a wider commitment to the Diocese and the Anglican Church.
6. There is an additional section that looks beyond the parish. This will include the City of Sheffield in which so many of our members work. Enabling our Christians to express their discipleship in the area of their work is vital – and is implied as acts which

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<sup>3</sup> Günter W, “Grow” (Brown C. (ed.) The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol 2 Exeter: Paternoster, 1976), p.129

express God's love in their working context. The use of "beyond" also includes the idea of our participation in the wider mission of God which includes a national dimension. In particular, it also includes a commitment to the idea of world mission and our responsibility to support it.

7. "Encountering the love of God" is an all inclusive expression seeking to include evangelism, social justice, service to the poor and needy. It also includes discipleship, salvation, proclamation of the challenge of the Kingdom of God, healing, deliverance, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. All of these are worthy and could be included. However for the sake of brevity these are all assumed within these five words.
8. This is a mission statement, not a vision statement nor a statement of values. By its very nature it puts mission as the primary purpose and intention. Whilst worship is our primary reason for existence, mission is our primary purpose.
9. Mission is notoriously difficult to define. This statement accepts the definition adopted by the Anglican Communion in the 1980s:

"The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:

- a. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.
- b. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.
- c. To respond to human need by loving service.
- d. To seek to transform the unjust structures of society.
- e. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the earth."

All of these can come under the umbrella of "encountering the love of God".

Finally, but most important of all, is the recognition that mission must always be God's mission.

- There is always the temptation to seek to fulfil mission in our own strength, to make God's Kingdom come through our own endeavour. Biblically, the mission is always God's. Not only is mission his, it actually reflects his nature. Within the Trinity there is already a sense of sending and being sent, which spills over into God's mission into the world  
John 20:21 "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
- Growth is the work of God.  
I Cor 3:5b-8 "as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."
- It is essential then that we always seek God for renewal in our lives, in our church and in our community. The very best of mission statements is nothing worth if it is not reflective of and dependent upon a deep and profound life of prayer.

Simon Bessant  
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