**Diocese of Winchester**

**Lent Lectures**

**21 March 2017**

**LECTURE ONE**

**Church Growth: Why it Matters**

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**Ten Ideas to Stop Church Growth**

*Here are 10 tried-and-tested, assured ways that churches are using to ensure that they do not have visitors or new people.*

**1. Don’t have a website.**

**2. If you have a website make sure it looks like a 1970s video game. Better still – don’t update it.** If it looks like it is regularly updated, that’s extra helpful if information is incorrect. If you have any images, make them last-millennium, poorly pixilated, tacky clip art. Photos should be of few people, old, and only of one gender. Current clergy and leaders should not be identifiable by visitors. **Do not provide a map or an address of your church** – if they are there, make them nearly impossible to find. **Do not include times of services.** If they are there, make sure they are the wrong times or the times you used to meet. **Do not provide contact information.** Phone numbers should be of clergy who left long ago. **Do not have village, city, town, region, and suburb information on your website**, nor denomination – no way that a google search of a visitor would locate your site. **Do not have a diocesan website that provides information** geographically or in the way that visitors might be able to find a church service. **As many people now access the web from phones, websites should be very mobile unfriendly**

**3. On church answerphone messages do not put service times.** If you put service times, make sure they are wrong

**4. Do not have a notice board by your church building.**

**5. If you have a notice board make it unreadable from the road.** Put a message about Jesus or a quote from the Bible, but no service times or contact information. **If you put service times, make sure they are wrong**. **If there is a contact phone number make sure it is out of date**, or the person is on holiday and does not answer the phone.

**6. Meet in a place different to where you normally meet** without putting this on your website or church notice board **Meet one week in one place, and next week in a completely different place** without telling people. Those in the club all know that is what you do.

**7. Do not have anyone greeting or welcoming** at the church door before the service. Especially if where the service is being held is unclear. It is also good not to use the obvious main door, and to keep this locked.

**8. In major holiday and tourism destinations, do not put information** in camp sites, hotels, or tourist offices

**9. Do not have an advertisement or presence in local newspapers, on local radio, on TV, or at the cinema**
**10. A bonus to make visitors feel extra unwelcome**, do not explain unusual practices your church has. Do not even provide a written explanation.

Adapted from: <http://liturgy.co.nz/11-ways-to-stop-church-growth> - ACCESSED 240116

**Necessary Throat Clearing:**

* *What is church ?* primarily the local church.
* *What is church growth ?* The Church of England has defined it as three things: Growth in personal holiness; Growth in service to the wider community; Growth, numerically, of congregations.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* *How do churches grow?* Only ‘God gives the growth’. Church growth is not primarily about techniques. ‘God gives the growth’, *but* He expects us to contribute – as did Paul and Apollos. (1 Cor 3:6).
* *Where are we ?* Secularity is the dominant culture; we are no longer in Christendom. Christianity is in the position of needing to creatively subvert the dominant culture – just as it was in the first centuries.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Central Point: Salvation shows us why we should grow the church**

* *Salvation in Scripture: Kingdom and Church, not Kingdom or Church*
* *Salvation: the Trinity and Church Growth*
* *Salvation: Church Growth is Central across the Breadth of Christian Tradition*
* *Salvation as being about social action AND evangelism*
* *Salvation: Church Growth as being Fully Sacramental*
* *Salvation: lessons in church growth from the worldwide church*
* *Salvation: empirical data shows us how church membership promotes well being*

**Towards A Theology of Church Growth**

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**David Marshall on Pluralism, Dialogue and Proclamation**

although Hick argues that both theistic and non-theistic religions are equally salvific in value, “he holds that our final (and therefore presumably true) relation to the ‘Real’ is one of eternal loving communion with a personalist, all-loving God”. That is, although Hick intends to relativise traditional Christian claims about Jesus as determinative revelation of God, he at the same time implicitly maintains a picture of God essentially as revealed in Jesus. Yet it is not at all clear why this should be so. The religions of the world, taken on their own terms, do not all believe in a personalist God who seeks loving communion with all human beings. The Christian understanding of God looks rather unlike what some religious traditions speak of when they use the word “God”. Hick at one moment tells us that we can’t claim that Christianity gives us a uniquely true account of God, and at the same time he proposes a basically Christian understanding of God, placing that God as the divinity secretly at the heart of the world’s religious traditions.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Mark Bonnington on Kingdom and Church**

Conversion in New Testament times was a high commitment activity, especially for gentiles:

“A slave converted and wanted to go out early or late to meet other believers. He made up for it by working harder. A household converted and the household gods disappeared from the corner of the room. The master avoided the temples of the gods but instead invited people to dine with him at his own house. When he did so he omitted the traditional libation to his guild’s divinity and instead thanked the God of heaven for the meal. Insider and outsider alike knew something had changed and the reasons why were freely on offer. When this was questioned and opposed and people persisted the reputation of the church to be taken seriously grew rather than diminished. Coming up against the authorities the believers made the case for their faith respectfully, accepted protection gladly and carefully kept their theological distance from Roman divinities and power….The fact that everyone had given up something from their past for the sake of Christ surely created communities where the sense of joint ownership of the new was universal and challenged people to change.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Ivor Davidson**, on church growth in the early church:

* “the idea that this God *loved* human beings, willed that they should know him personally, and suffered and died in human form so as to make it possible – that would have struck many pagan hearers as simply bizarre”.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Regarding the situation of Christians in the contemporary west, Davidson writes: “Whether this is a threat or an opportunity to Christian faith depends greatly on perspective. Christians today may well lament their marginality, taking it as evidence that numerical church growth is not God’s purpose in their generation. Alternatively, they may, as the early church did, consider it an opportunity to hope in God’s promises, his power to transform the least likely of cultural situations, and to do so in ways which will yet in fact mean substantial, visible growth.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Graham Tomlin on the Holy Spirit and Church Growth**

* “Theologically speaking, mission and the consequent growth of the church begins with the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from the Father. It starts with the Trinitarian life of God before it ever involves the creation, let alone the human part of that creation.”[[7]](#footnote-7)
* “A church without the Spirit is no church at all. Or in the words of the most recent Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatios IV: *“Without the Spirit, God is far away, Christ belongs to the past, the gospel is a dead letter, the church is a mere organisation, mission is turned into propaganda. But in the Spirit, God is near, the risen Christ is present with us here and how, the gospel is the power of life, the church signifies Trinitarian communion, mission is an expression of Pentecost.””[[8]](#footnote-8)*

**Church Growth and the Christian Tradition**

**St Cuthbert and Church Growth**

‘[Cuthbert] used especially to make for those places and preach in those villages that were far away on steep and rugged mountains, which others dreaded to visit and whose poverty and ignorance kept other teachers away’

(Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iv.27)

**Jane Austen and Church Growth**

Father of Heaven, may thy mercy be extended over all mankind, bringing the ignorant to the knowledge of thy truth, awakening the impenitent, touching the hardened. Look with compassion on the afflicted of every condition, assuage the pangs of disease, comfort the broken in spirit. Amen.

(taken from I. Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy*, 199-200)

**St Francis and Church Growth:**

“In the thirteenth century as in the nineteenth, rapid urban expansion meant the disruption of historic parish connections and habits of churchgoing and domestic piety, and thus the need for evangelisation of a whole generation. It is well known that St.Francis invented the concept of the Christmas crib: but it is less frequently appreciated that he did so precisely because there was a pressing need for new ways to teach the story of Jesus' nativity to an ill-educated population that knew nothing of the Christian story. The work of evangelism was foundational to the friars. Chapter 12 of St. Francis' 1223 Rule was devoted to 'regulating and promoting missionary activity', and for the rest of the medieval period and beyond friars were to be found preaching not only across Europe but also at the furthest reaches of the known world, in eastern Europe, India, China, Africa and the newly discovered Americas, often well in advance of official envoys or trade delegations.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Evidence for the Impact Joining a Church has on well being:**

**Religion and Well Being – a report by the Theos thinktank, 2016, accessible at:**

[**http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2016/06/26/religion-and-well-being-assessing-the-evidence**](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2016/06/26/religion-and-well-being-assessing-the-evidence)

**Professor Tanya Luhrmann, Stanford University:**

 ‘What one might call an avalanche of medical data has demonstrated that, for reasons still poorly understood, those who attend church and believe in God are healthier and happier and live longer than those who do not.’[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. The Archbishops’ Council, *Anecdote to Evidence*, (London: Church House 2014), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* – or try: J.A. Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, (Grand Rapids 2014). For a portrait of early Christianity as counter-cultural, see: C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*, (OUP 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Marshall, ‘Dialogue, Proclamation and the Growth of the Church’ *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*: 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. M. Bonnington, ‘The Kingdom of God and Church Growth’, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, p. 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I. Davidson, ‘Church Growth in the Early Church’, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, p. 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Davidson, ‘Church Growth in the Early Church’, p. 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. G. Tomlin, ‘The Prodigal Spirit and Church Growth’, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, p.136 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tomlin, ‘The Prodigal Spirit and Church Growth’, p. 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. M. Threlfall Homes, ‘Growing the Medieval Church’, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, p. 188-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. T. Luhrmann, *When God talks Back*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), p. 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)