

Edinburgh: St. Nicholas' Sighthill

Future Focus Session 3 (12/5/18) Facilitator's Report

Introduction

A total of 22 people (not including the Minister or facilitator) attended the session which, on this occasion, was held in the smaller church hall. As previously, there were one or two new faces that joined us, but equally, one or two former attendees were unable to attend. As in previous meetings, people were seated around tables, this time, divided into four groups.

This final session was a daytime event (10.00am to 3pm) and as people arrived, they were welcomed with tea or coffee and biscuits. Upon gathering, the session began with Rev Tom Kisitu once again introducing the facilitator, Rob Rawson. Rob then led a time of worship before the main programme got underway. (Thanks to Anne for operating the music machine.)

The Story so far

Rob began with a brief re-cap of the previous two sessions, mainly as another refresher, but also for the benefit of anyone not present on either occasion. The main points were highlighted from the timeline, mapping and health check exercises.

Thinking of Newcomers

The session's first exercise was to discuss what each group felt had been the most significant development in the life of the church over the last two years (give or take a few months). Once this had been agreed upon, the groups were then invited to reflect on how this may have helped to develop the congregation's 'health'.

The groups then had to address the questions of how such a development might help or hinder a newcomer from engaging with the congregation. This was followed by a feedback session in which everyone was able to hear each group's responses.

For recording purposes, we'll simply name the groups by a number, but identifying which persons were in each group is of course, unnecessary. (*The group names may not necessarily be the same for the second exercise that concerns dreaming dreams.*)

Group 1 Primary Development:

- Rev Tom Kisitu's arrival and getting established

In what ways has this helped us to become a healthier church?

- Community engagement.
- Team building with enthusiasm.
- Congregation has become more cosmopolitan.
- Continuity of love and care.
- A growing level of participation from the congregation in church affairs.
- Become less insular – reaching out to other branches of the Church of Scotland
- Better connecting with users of our premises and also with community groups
- Persistent ministries (such as prayer and finance).

How might this help/hinder a newcomer to engage with our church?

Helps

- A willingness to embrace change.
- A commitment to life within the church.
- We are creating an atmosphere that demonstrates Christian love and practice in how we engage with fellow members (and other Christians).

Hindrances

- There are too many 'cliques' within groups.
- Newcomers may not wish to take up certain positions for fear of upsetting those currently in post.
- The challenge of getting involved.
- Communications can be weak (groups talking to other groups in the church).

Group 2 Primary Development:

- The arrival of Tom Kisitu

In what ways has this helped us to become a healthier church?

- New forms of worship have been introduced.
- A greater focus on Jesus and faith, leading to more lay participation.
- Closer relationships with one another.
- We have been more open to change.
- New people have joined us.

How might this help/hinder a newcomer to engage with our church?

Helps

- A genuine welcome.
- Getting alongside people.
- Introducing them to Tom.
- Inviting them to tea/coffee in the hall.

Hindrances

- Possible reticence to be involved (especially early on).
- The possibility of us 'falling between two stools' in not wanting to intrude, but also not wanting to go over the top with invitations for involvement.

Group 3 Primary Development:

- New Minister's arrival

In what ways has this helped us to become a healthier church?

- We've become a more supportive, pro-active family.
- It has encouraged us to go into the community (such as the Calder flats, food bank and Bethany Trust).
- We have re-engaged with the local schools.
- JAM team introduced.
- We've worked together to raise funds for the new roof (encouraged by the Church of Scotland).
- Special services have been developed – St. Nicholas' Day, Bereavement and Remembrance Day.

How might this help/hinder a newcomer to engage with our church?

Helps

- Opportunity to make friends.
- Providing opportunities to get involved.
- Teenagers feel encouraged to visit.
- They may be approached to offer new ideas.

Hindrances

- A lack of continuity in hospitality beyond the initial welcome.
- People may feel under pressure to contribute.

Group 4 Primary Development:

- The arrival of Rev Tom Kisitu

In what ways has this helped us to become a healthier church?

- We have become a closer and friendlier congregation.
- Now we are more outward looking.
- Our singing has improved – bringing us closer together.
- The growth of St. Nicholas' Day and Messy Church – both bring in children and families.

How might this help/hinder a newcomer to engage with our church?

Helps

- An improved welcome with inclusion.
- An opportunity to be invited to participate in activities/groups.
- An opportunity for families to become involved/integrated.

Hindrances

- Offers of help may be rejected (sometimes).

After the feedback, there was a short comfort break.

Dreams for the future

After much looking back and also looking at present issues, it was at last, time to look forward! The timelines (from the first session) were placed back on the tables and without initial discussion, everyone was invited to write on individual post-it notes their hopes, vision and dreams for 2020/21 (and even beyond). People were able to write as many as they wished and stick them down on their respective timelines. Afterwards, there was a time for discussion at their tables and each group "clustered" the post-it notes, according to common themes, such as outreach, worship, desires for more young people in the congregation, etc. There were however, occasional clusters of just one or two post-it notes, but all were to be treated equally.

Once this exercise was done, each group was asked to look at the clusters and agree on three main dreams and then to write these on the ends of the lining paper sheets, under the written heading of "Hopes, Vision, Dreams".

The final task in the group exercise was to prioritise a top dream from the three chosen. Rob invited each group to read out their dreams, whilst he wrote them on the flipchart, thus allowing for noting of any common themes.

Each group duly came up with an agreed set of three, including their prioritised, top dream. These dreams are listed below, with the first “priority dream” listed first in each case. For this exercise, the groups have again been named by number, although as before, there are no names mentioned and it certainly has nothing to do with any ranking!

The groups’ dreams were as follows:

Group 1

1. A church full of young people.
2. A church with a variety of services, styles and times to suit all.
3. A church as a focus in the whole community for comfort, joy and help.

Group 2

1. A community hub.
2. Financially secure.
3. A variety of services.

Group 3

1. A large, diverse congregation – with appropriate worship.
2. Engagement with the community.
3. An effective prayer ministry.

Group 4

1. Sharing our faith in the community by word and action.
2. Our building is the community hub.
3. A service where the congregation can see and hear – and meets its various needs.

LUNCH

A well-earned and very tasty lunch was then taken in the main hall. A special thanks goes to all those who organised the food.

Clustering the dreams

Straight after the lunch break, Rob (having earlier consulted with Tom) highlighted the fact that a number of the dreams could be clustered, so that basically, from an original list of 12 dreams, there were possibly four or five main dream themes in total.

Stepping out towards the dreams

The same four groups were then invited to agree and outline the very first two steps they would take towards each of their dreams. The principal dreams are listed in bold type.

Group 1 – 1. ‘A church full of young people’

1. Appoint a suitable team.
2. Identify young people’s needs in the community e.g. schools and established links.

2. 'A church with a variety of services, styles and times to suit all'

1. Communicate through the magazine to solicit people's views about church services.
2. Put a large suggestion box in church to gather views.

3. 'A church as a focus in the community for comfort, joy and hope'

1. Appoint a suitable team (with the right interest and skills).
2. Produce and distribute a flyer to gather the needs of the community.

Group 2 – 1. 'A community hub'

1. Produce a community survey/questionnaire.
2. Form an action group and audit.

2. 'Financially secure'

1. Hold regular finance meetings to examine fund-raising options.
2. Involve the congregation as a whole through a magazine article.

3. 'A variety of services'

1. Consult the Worship Committee.
2. Conduct a survey for parish needs.

Group 3 – 1. 'A large, diverse congregation – with appropriate worship'

1. Set up a steering group to organise certain events.
2. Host a well-publicised open day or barbecue to draw in people.

2. 'Engagement with the community'

1. Form a group to organise secular events (ceilidhs, concerts, discos, etc).

3. 'An effective prayer ministry'

1. Grow ourselves first!
2. Train a group to pray with individuals after the service, just being free to step out in faith.

Group 4 – 1. 'Sharing our faith in the community by word and action'

1. Identify individuals who can be freed up and trained for a mission team that will begin the process of listening to the community.
2. Review the response, identifying the needs (key areas) and assessing our response (a plan).

2. *'Our building is the community hub'*

1. Conduct a community audit.
2. Assess the suitability of our premises and the availability of management, staffing and health & safety.
3. Establish any conflict of interest and consider the uniqueness of services to be provided.

3. *'A service where the congregation can see and hear – and meets its various needs'*

1. Invite the Worship Team to identify requirements.
2. Conduct an audio system review (with CARTA's advice).

These steps were then shared with each other in a short, plenary session.

Communicating the vision (“vision casting”)

The tables were then removed and everybody formed a large semi-circle with their chairs and Rob organised a fun game of “Chinese Whispers”. Rob then explained how this illustrated that a simple message or statement can easily be distorted if passed on individually. If however, a vision or aim is communicated corporately and in a coordinated way, such as by a newsletter, web site, intimation, etc. and all at the same time, then any confusion and/or spreading of rumours may be easily avoided.

Rob then cited a personal (and amusing!) anecdote about when his teenage bedroom was being decorated that highlighted the need to share a vision and allow for comment before implementing any major changes that may result from it.

What next?

There was a short time for any further comments and Rob then intimated that in due course, he would complete and send his third and final report.

Rob also intimated that it was not his intention to walk away and leave the church to get on with things, but would remain in contact, and be available for any future support if required.

Tom then thanked Rob for his facilitation and the meeting was closed with a time of prayer.

Rob Rawson Facilitator