

Can mission be comfortable?



The call to share in God's mission has been a key challenge in churches across the denominations over recent years. National and regional initiatives have been promoted. People have been appointed and tasked with making churches more missional. However, for many small rural congregations this often feels uncomfortable, if not threatening. Given some appropriate support, it can become a joy.

Rural Mission Solutions was established to help rural churches develop bespoke, self-sustaining mission strategies tailored in such a way as to fit the local church well. Most of us obtain our clothes 'off the peg' but we still want them to be the right size and shape, something we feel happy to wear, and that will not be embarrassing. The same intentions should inform the development of bespoke mission strategies.

The first stage of obtaining a bespoke garment involves the tailor taking careful measurements, discussing our preferences in style and the purpose of the garment. Later there will be fittings when adjustments can be made. Bespoke mission strategies always begin in the same way, with listening and seeking to understand the people that make up the church and the context in which it is set.

One size rarely fits all. The Bible reveals that within our churches people have diverse gifts and abilities, usually exercised in a variety of different ways. God is not in the business of pressing square pegs into round holes. He knows who we are, what our life experiences have been, what our personalities are like and the giftings we each have. He lovingly calls all that makes us who we are to share in his mission in distinct ways.

Since every Christian is unique and has a distinct role within God's mission plan, it follows that every church will be distinct in how it responds corporately to that call to mission.

A lack of clarity over the differences between mission and evangelism has caused confusion in many churches. 'Mission', the idea of being sent with a purpose, has several aspects, of which evangelism is one. The 'Five Marks of Mission', formulated by the Anglican Church but now widely shared across the denominations, help to clarify the distinction, describing mission as:

- Voicing the good news about God's love in Jesus with the intention of encouraging others into a living relationship with God and a life of discipleship
- Caring for those in need
- Acting for justice
- Safeguarding the integrity of creation
- Nurturing the faith of new believers

The mission to which we are called is not defined by self-selecting from the five marks; it should encompass all of them. The bespoke approach helps each church to explore and celebrate what they are doing well, and to identify what is missing and offer support to enable it.

Careful and prayerful listening and a commitment to growing in understanding are vital. Only once this has taken place is it possible to explore, develop and implement a bespoke mission strategy. Encouraging the

whole church to share in the process over time is an enriching and inspiring experience. If all are involved then all will understand and have a sense of ownership of the outcomes.

Undertaken thoughtfully, intentionally and appropriately, mission should be neither arduous nor embarrassing. In fact it should fit and suit very well.

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