FUTURE TRAVELLERS June 2017 – IAN’S INPUT.

Whilst at the time I actually didn’t think the conference had gone that well, partly because I didn’t think I had led it well and it certainly didn’t go in the direction I thought it would. On reflection some interesting things emerged which I see as a series of ‘creative tensions’

**First Creative Tension**

My rather risky question at the end (why do you stay?) revealed something important I think.

* On the one hand there is an agreement that the church is about following Jesus, and following Jesus together, and helping each other become better followers of Jesus – all of which results in our continuing his work.
* On the other hand that is expressed in terms of the church being important because of what it does for ‘me’ – it helps me to get through life. (that isn’t meant to be as selfish as it sounds.)

There are two consequences of this:

* Our current set up (the way that we do things and the culture/character) of our church does ‘produce disciples’. People are growing in Christ as a result of being part of our church.
* But there is a danger that we contain the ‘seeds of our own destruction’: because church works for me – what it does for me becomes most important not the fact that it helps everyone grow in Christ and therefore continues Jesus work in the world.

Two questions come out of this:

* How can we do what we do better?
* How can we be more deliberate in our discipleship of: seekers, new Christians, and ‘maturing Christians’?

**Second Creative Tension**

It became clear at the conference and in the resulting feedback that different people prioritise different things! In particular some emphasise the need to concentrate on our discipleship and others want to see the church more deliberate in its serving and reaching out to the community. Again these are not incompatible, but if we don’t recognise the fact that we emphasise different things it can lead to frustration. Two questions arise from this:

* How can we focus on discipleship (the questions from ‘tension 1’) in a way that results in people continuing the work of Jesus?
* How can we increase what we do in the community without becoming an organisation that does things (as opposed to a community of disciples)?

**Third Creative Tension**

I heard two related concerns being expressed which relate to the fact that ‘church works’. One was that we don’t want to lose what we have. The other was that all of this talk was about ‘numbers’ – having a ‘bigger’ church.

The tension is this: our church ‘works’ and we don’t want to lose what we have. But, there are approximately 4000 people living in Stockethill of whom less than 100 have a connection with our church – we’ll be lucky if 200 have a connection with any church. So what about the other 3800? Don’t they deserve the opportunity to become followers of Jesus. Now I know that we’re unlikely to become a church of 4000 members! But if we develop a form of church that requires there to be no more than 60 people involved, we are putting up a barrier to the other 3800. The question then is this: how can an increasing number of people be part of a ‘small church’? The answer is lots of small churches.

**Fourth Creative Tension**

If there is a need for us (in the long term) to think about having a variety of communities that are similar, at least in ethos, to what we have (and Stocket Grange is an example of our trying to do that – and so there are lessons to be learnt there) then there is a fourth issue to think about.

Lots of people said lots of nice things about Sarah and Ian (which is very nice!). It is clear that Ian and Sarah have been very important in the development of and continuing life of the current form of church (which we don’t want to lose and which ‘works’ although it could be improved). But if we want the other 3800 people to have the opportunity to be part of such a church – we can’t rely on Ian and Sarah to be at the heart of such churches. The questions that arise from this are:

* To what extent is it “Ian and Sarah” as people that has been/is important, and to what extent is it the roles that they play?
* How can we structure/facilitate the church in a way that is not reliant on Ian/Sarah (or their equivalent) and is therefore ‘reproducible’?
* How do we help those people who are called to ‘lead/serve’ *in* the church to discover their calling, and equip and release them into it?
* What is the role of ‘the minister’ in the sort of church that we’re talking about in all of the above?

There are lots of questions raised by all of the above, but it also leads to two important conclusions:

* Is there an emerging ‘vision’ that we can get behind: something to do with a community which develops disciples who continue the work of Jesus – a community which is deliberately small, inclusive, together, etc – and a community which is committed to creating new communities with the same character so that more people can be part of such communities?
* Are there practical steps that we might now take in light of that vision? Such steps would need to be small (so as not to freak people) but deliberate and clear (so that people feel there is momentum); owned (so that people are willing to take them) and are clearly taking us in the direction of the ‘vision’ (so that people know why we are taking them).

**Discussion**

Spilt into 4 groups and everyone gets to choose which group you are in.

1. Doing what we do better?

We think that simply being part of our church can help people to follow Jesus.

Is this true?

What is it about our church that does that? (think about what we do and the culture of our church)

How could we do what we do better?

1. Being more deliberate in discipleship

We think that we need to be more deliberate in helping each other grow as followers of Jesus in all aspects of our lives (e.g. behaviour, understanding, mission, values, personal devotions, ‘skill’, knowledge etc)?

Is this true?

How might we do that for the following groups:

* People who are not yet Christians by interested?
* New Christians?
* Maturing Christians?

How do we do it in a way that includes people at different stages of life (children, families, working, older people etc) and different ‘kinds’ of people?

1. Serving our Community Together

We want to help each other love and serve our neighbours where-ever we find ourselves and in the ways God calls us each to do that. A significant number of people are expressing a desire to love and serve the community of Stockethill in a more deliberate way.

How might that be developed?

*(Note: we are not looking for a list of evangelistic or outreach ideas. Rather think about how people expressing that desire to serve the community might find the best way to serve the community together.)*

1. Leadership Development

We think that the leadership structure of the church may have to change in order for the church to develop. And we think that we will need to equip and release more people into leadership roles?

Is that true?

How might we go about doing that?

GROUP WORK

In answering the questions you don’t need to come up with a ‘final answer’. In fact your discussion might throw up more questions or reveal some of the things we need to think about in this area. However if you do come up with any practical suggestions try and make them:

* Small (so as not to freak people)
* Deliberate and clear (so that people feel there is momentum)
* Taking us in the direction of the ‘vision’ of small communities that follow Jesus together in a way that continues his work in the world(so that people know why we are taking these steps).

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