So, we’ve talked a lot about moving from A to B.

The reason that we’ve talked about moving from A to B is not primarily because we’ve seen B and thought: that looks great, let’s go there. Rather it’s because we’ve considered A and thought – this isn’t all that we want, or that we think God wants for us, and we believe that there is a B that God wants us to move to.

When the small group met folks felt that it would be helpful if we did in fact have a better idea of what B might look like: and they suspected that I had an idea of what B looked – or at least if I articulated what I thought B looked like, that would give us a chance to discuss it and evaluate it and shape it. So basically what the group felt it would be good for me to do was give a picture a possible future for the church. Not a blue print of something fully worked out; but a picture of a possible future that’s just a sketch and needs working out and may even to some extent seem beyond us at the moment. So that’s what I want to try and do; give a picture of a possible future.

First though let’s just remind ourselves what was the problem with A? I used the rather striking word, ‘stagnation’. Whether it was in terms of our growing as Christians – becoming more Christlike as individuals or a church; whether it was in terms of the impact we were having – again as individuals or a church – on the world – the way we were continuing the work of Jesus: or whether it was simply in terms of our ability to grow beyond the 50 or 60 people in the community centre congregation that seemed to be a barrier. In all these ways there seemed to be a stuckness – a stagnation.

And this stuckness takes place in a difficult context: one in which things are not what they used to be; the relationship between the church and society has changed and continues to change. And a context in which the church in Scotland, and particularly the Church of Scotland, is in rapid decline that will have a major impact upon us. So in order to unstick ourselves, get things moving again, it was going to take some creative: which is not something we’re scared of because that’s part of who we are as a church.

So there was something wrong with A, this stagnation, that pushed us to ask whether we should move to B.

Now there is also an awful lot that is right with A. A has served us well. We like the church as it is. It has helped us to grow in Christ. The character and nature of our community life is something we value.

So we began to ask what is it about A that we need to address in order to get things flowing, so that we’re not stagnating. And we came up with 4 areas that we think we need to address. Because we value what we have – we need to do what we do better – specifically thinking about the community centre congregation and our life together. We need to be more intentional in our discipleship – in helping each other grow as Christians. All of that is going to take leadership and we need to develop more leaders, better leaders, a better leadership structure to make that happen. And that is all for a purpose: continuing the work of Jesus in the world – Mission.

And what is fascinating to me is that even in simply talking about these things – we are seeing the water begin to flow, the church begin to flourish. The number of people involved in worship, the number of people taking up the CBE, the increase in prayer, the involvement of people – these and other things are real signs of growth and encouragements.

So there is a sense that we are on the right track. But the question that the small group asked was still what does B look like. Where are we heading; what is the vision.

So I want to share with you a picture of a possible future.

**The picture of the possible future that I have is of a church made up of a number of small congregations where people can belong to a loving Christian community which helps each other grow as Christians: they help each other faithfully follow Jesus and continue the work of Jesus in the world.**

In this picture of a possible future, the Community Centre Congregation will be a community of around 50 – 70 people, as it currently is, with the same sort of ethos and culture and feeling – except that, in this future, we will be doing what we do better, we will be more intentional about our discipleship, we will be developing leaders and have a better leadership structure, and this will have results in terms of mission. But if that was all that future contained, then we would be limiting ourselves in terms of mission. We would not grow beyond 70 people.

So in the picture of the possible future there are basically more community centre type congregations. They might not worship in the same way, or learn from the bible in the same way, or care for one another in the same way. But they will do all of those things – and they will do it as a small community of people trying to help each other faithfully follow Jesus.

Now let me remind you: this picture of a possible future is a sketch. The detail isn’t yet worked out. We do already have some sense of what this might look like in that we have 3 congregations in the church: but the truth is that Woodhill Court, and to a slightly lesser extent, Stocket Grange, are dependent upon the Community Centre congregation. And we probably could not sustain many more such congregation. Stocket Grange is a first attempt to do the sort of thing we’re talking about, so there’s much to learn from it.

In this picture of a possible future though, we’re talking about congregations that are not dependent on one ‘mother ship’ if you like. Interdependent.

One of the big questions is, how could the Community Centre Congregation function without a fulltime minister – because each of these congregations will not be able to have a full time minister all to themselves.

There are a number of questions and difficulties – some of which might seem unsolvable just now.

But let me just finish with the question of why we would want to do this? Well I’ve already said that if we just focus on the community centre congregation there is a limit to our ability to grow. But one could argue that that is OK. We’re not the only church in the world, let alone Aberdeen. There are already multiple congregations.

However, what we have in the community centre is *a way* for people to come to faith and grow in faith. So we want to multiply this particular *way* of being church. We also want to go beyond it. We need to recognise that, at least in the church of Scotland, if not beyond it, there is a need for church communities to be able to be self-sustaining, without huge amounts of resources. This is a way of trying to achieve that.

**What is the picture of the possible future?**

* Well it is one in which we are helping a growing number of people are becoming Christians;
* one in which a growing number of people are growing as Christians and in which we are all growing deeper – more effectively – as Christians
* one in which we are as individuals and as a church growing in our impact on the world in the name of Jesus – continuing the work of Jesus.

The picture of the church which I see emerging in the next 5 to 10 years is one in which there are a number of small, close knit congregations, similar in many significant ways to the current Community Centre; led by their own leaders or leadership teams; autonomous but supporting one another.