

An approach to Anglican Catholic Mission?

The following approach described in 'three movements' was developed arising from a practice of local church mission overseas that was 'strengths-based'. Asset-based development is understood by many development practitioners as holding greater hope for sustainable impact than deficit-based approaches.

The Mission of the Local Church in 3 Movements. No. 1 The Power to *Affirm*

People are created in the image of God. That image is reflected in the strengths of communities all over the world. Before ordination I spent over 20 years travelling in connection with faith-based development. I have never visited a community that fails to exhibit the ability to care for its own, to create a sense of belonging, to be able to initiate positive change, to identify leaders from within and to find hope together. Sometimes poverty and marginalisation distort, diminish and threaten to destroy these strengths. But they are there. Waiting to be revealed.

The church has the power, and every reason, to affirm these strengths, to evoke them as responses to the love of God revealed after a long time of waiting. Few other groups have such an opportunity and reason. People are created for good. This is the first movement in mission; as relevant and appropriate here in Lewisham as in the poorest communities served by the Anglican churches around the world.

What more positive aspect of a church's mission can there be than to ask together, what strengths can we build upon to make this community even better, even more caring? Even more inclusive? Even more creative and inviting? At St Mary's Parish Church in Lewisham we are seeking to refresh our vision and sense of mission for the next chapter of our life together.

The Mission of the Local Church in 3 Movements. No. 2 The Power to *Convene*

When people, however fragile their lives may be, are affirmed (The first movement in mission: the power to affirm), when the church shows deep empathy and a willingness to listen and learn from people, the church earns the right to convene community conversations. On a trip a couple of years ago to Ghana, out in the sticks, in a small rural town, I watched the impact of this happening. Someone from the community said, 'there is no one who brings us together anymore'. That was a prophetic cry if ever there was one. Bringing people together, different generations, different tribes, creeds, to build something that everyone recognises as being intrinsically good. With the power to convene comes the need for good facilitation and accompaniment. A simple framework constructed of open questions that evoke positive, life-giving responses. When conversations were convened, people's imaginations were fired and they named simple things they could do to address shared concerns and hopes. Malaria nets which had been distributed for free were used to protect children, additional nets were purchased because people began to understand how the nets would save lives and so people were willing to invest a small amount of cash to buy them. This all resulted out of a conversation.

If it can happen in Ghana, it should be able to happen here in Lewisham too. The

issues will be different obviously. What other groups in Lewisham share our longing to see people who are facing challenges and disadvantage making simple responses that can be supported by others with connections and expertise? This is a recipe for overcoming dependency and giving people appropriate support. Good facilitation asks the best questions: What are the strengths we see within our diversity? What are the different communities we each belong to? What are the strengths we see in those different communities? How much do we all share in common once we strip away our badges of status and positions? What are our shared concerns and aspirations for a better community? What simple actions can we take together to respond to our shared concerns and hopes? Who do we need to invite to the table – who is missing? Who needs to be part of our conversations? What are we learning together about our shared life together in our communities?

The power to convene is the second movement in a mission to enable people to dream dreams and act together to flourish.

The mission of the local church in 3 Movements: No. 3 The Power to *Reflect*

The power to affirm (the first movement in a three-fold mission of the local church) the strengths that exist in communities, which reflect the image of God in all people, and the power to bring people together – to convene (the second movement), are two key elements for local mission. But what is unique, and the gift of the church is the power to reflect with the community on the nature of a God who values every person. In Christ, God declares his love for all people; his 'yes' to every person. That love is non-negotiable; simply and uniquely enacted in time and space. The implicit challenge is, what response will each of us make to the love of God?

The opportunities for the church to enable reflection on questions of love, grief, faith, birth, forgiveness, reconciliation, death, new beginnings, hope, in the course of its affirming and convening work are huge and often strangely tangential. People go away with something to think about. People awaken to the truth that each of us, regardless of which faith we adhere to, has a spirituality that resonates with the quest for flourishing communities where no one is left behind. People are transformed.

The really liberating thing about this three-fold approach to mission is that the community itself comes up with the ideas and the initiatives to work on themselves. The church gets stuck in, accompanies, walks alongside and helps the community to reflect on enduring values and on faith in a God of love as a springboard of hope as it journeys along. The simple command to love God with mind, body and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves, with its roots way back in time, appeals on several levels, not least, the level of enlightened self-interest.