

# Marks of a Healthy Church

## Leadership Team Reflection Booklet



**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
OF AUSTRALIA  
*where love comes to life*

**LCAQD**

**Department for Ministry and Mission, 2018**

Based on concepts from  
Robert Warren, *The Healthy Church Handbook*  
Ver 1.

## **Towards a Missional Church**

My dad was a pastor. Well, technically he still is – he retired many years ago but now has a new title Emeritus Pastor. I am thankful for him. And I am thankful that he taught me many things about grace, and life, and mission.

I can distinctly remember, as a teenager, having numerous conversations ('arguments' might be too strong a word) with my father about mission. And most of those conversations ended up with me telling him what needed to be done to 'fix the church' (and yes, that was in the late 1970's, early 1980's), and him saying what are you going to do about it. And me doing nothing! To be honest, all I did was complain.

One day, dad nailed me with an important truth. In the height of one strong conversation, dad simply said, "David, I prefer my way of doing something than your way of doing nothing".

And he was right!

So that afternoon, convicted by the Holy Spirit, I invited my friend to church.

It wasn't easy!

And while my friend enjoyed the loud music, and the song "Watch Out for the Wolf Inside", (I took him to an LSF service at St Stephens, Wakefield Street with Robin Mann's band, Kinderkrist) and he was befriended by the people, he didn't cross the line and embrace the Christian faith.

But that is the journey we are on! As a missional church, we are on a journey of connecting with others and inviting them into a space where God's Spirit can work faith in them. And while at times the results can feel disappointing, the Christian faith knows that God's Creative Word always has the power to redeem.

*"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11, NIV*

I haven't seen my friend for years. But I do know that God's Word is Creative.

Is there someone in your life, that God has an invitation for?

- 1. Healthy churches clearly know their purpose.*
- 2. What is the reason why your church is here?*
- 3. Who, in the wider community would notice if your church was no longer here? What would they miss?*

## Toward a Missional Church – The First Two Commandments

I have always struggled with commandments. In short, I don't actually ever like being told what to do. Some say that I am just stubborn. I like to think that I am just human – original sin, that act of defiance and rebellion that is innately in each one of us, is very much a central part of my life. But more about that another time.

So perhaps, if you are like me, and you noticed the subtitle for this week's reflection on what it means to be a missional church, your first reaction is to feel the hair rise on the back of your neck. As good Lutherans, we are very sensitive about anything that could remotely take away from God's grace. And more about that another time too!

The one thing, however, that I can never get away from, is Jesus' command to love. When asked about the one greatest commandment, Jesus replied with a mathematical untruth. He said that there are two greatest commandments – Love God. Love others. (Matthew 22:36-40).

And this is the starting point of any missional church. Love God. Love others.

To Love God means ***to be energised by faith***. It is to be so aware of our brokenness so that we become the beggar that recognises the nothingness of their life. It is from this standpoint that God's amazing grace energises us. After all, faith is purely a gift from God. It is never anything that we muster up within ourselves. Over the

years, I have heard people talk about needing to have more faith, about needing to trust God more, but that sort of language can easily lead into the idea that faith is something that we 'do'... Note what Martin Luther said about faith; *“faith is God’s work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith.”* Faith is God’s work. Not ours.

The outcome of this faith, this *being energised by God’s work in us*, is that we become *outwardly focussed*. Knowing our own brokenness, we love and accept the brokenness in others. In short, we love others. We put the needs of others before our own. We don’t get distracted by things that are not of the gospel.

A fortnight ago, I pondered the question whether God was inviting you to share his Creative Word with someone. This week, I wonder, whether God is inviting you to love someone who is just as broken as you, who needs to encounter God’s grace? I know he is inviting me.

- 1. As a church community, what energises and excites you?*
- 2. How willingly/easily does your community acknowledge its brokenness?*
- 3. In what ways does the gospel transform you?*

## Looking Beyond

“Looking Beyond” is a piece of abstract metalwork by James Willie Faust. It draws the observer into the frame to the extent that they see outwardly with greater focus. It is not dissimilar to the way photographers used to frame shots with their hands.

Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 28:19-20

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19–20, NIV)

also known as The Great Commission, is similar in intent. When understood in the light of Acts 1:8

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8, NIV)

he draws us to look beyond ourselves and to engage with the local community, the wider community, and ultimately the global community.

The dilemma that we have, as followers of Jesus, is that by nature our hearts are turned inward on ourselves. At times we think that we are engaged outwardly with the world, but inwardly we are still self-serving. So, for example, soup kitchens are set up, so that we can engage in those less fortunate than us on our terms and

in our time, rather than engage with them every day. Essentially, we want things done 'my way'.

As we grow towards being a 'missional church', two things must happen.

First, we must identify with the tax-collector of Luke 18, and declare *"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."* (Luke 18:13, NIV)

Then, with the faith that God creates in us, we will notice God's presence in the world around us and engage in making the connection between faith and daily loving, responding to all human needs by lovingly serving. That is at the heart of the LCAQD mission statement "engaging people with God's love in everyday life". That is how "love comes to life".

I wonder what the Lutheran Church would be like, if every circumstance, we intentionally saw those around us, from those in our Lutheran family with whom we disagree theologically, to those in society who do not yet know the hope that is theirs in Jesus, as God's creation, and as reflecting God's presence?

*"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."* (Psalm 51:10, NIV)

- 1. If Jesus was living in your church, what sort of people would he be inviting?*
- 2. What do you understand by Jesus' command to 'go'?*
- 3. What might that look like in your congregation?*

## **Towards a Missional Church Following God's Heart**

I remember taking a college chapel.

I remember talking about the courage that Jesus had.

I remember making reference to Peter and his denial of Jesus.

I remember one student saying to me after chapel that morning, "I need to be bold in the faith that God has given me. I am going to stand at the top of the stairs at morning tea and declare 'I love Jesus' at the top of my voice."

I remember wondering whether he was for real.

He was! And he did!

To be a missional church is to be real in the confidence that we have in Jesus.

That is a scary thing to do. It requires acknowledging the old Adam inside of me. It requires acknowledging that part of me who is worried about what other people think of me, that wants me to be comfortable and safe. The old Adam inside me, about whom Luther says we should drown every day, is the part of me who stops me from being who I have been created to be, from being true to the new life that Christ's death on the cross has created in me.

To become a missional church is to be real to who we are. But more than that. It is to recognise the internal battle we often have with the 'old Adam' (or 'old Eve')

inside of me, and to be able to declare the words of Jesus in Gethsemane ‘not my will, but yours be done’.

What is God’s will?

Sometimes I think we confuse it with the things that we like.

Sometimes I think we confuse it with our own preferences and agendas.

But to be missional is to follow God’s heart. It means that we move from talking about ‘my church’ or ‘our church’, and start talking about God’s church. It is then that we let God become the focus of who we are and how we live. And to do that, in the light of the Easter message, is to confess ourselves and be willing to say, again and again, ‘not my will, but yours be done’.

What is God’s will? That all people experience the transforming love and peace that is our in what Jesus has done on the cross and given us through the empty tomb.

“Lord, not my will, but yours be done”.

- 1. What do you think is most on God’s heart?*
- 2. What evidence is there that our church is ‘after God’s own heart’?*
- 3. What do you think it means to be ‘real in the confidence that we have in Jesus’?*

## **Towards a Mission Church Facing Costs**

He was a strange looking bloke; his hair stiffly plastered across his forehead in a style reminiscent of parents in a 1950's movie. And he came into our Lutheran church, every Sunday, rigid and awkward, with wife and two grandchildren in tow. It seemed a mismatch. The church that I was part of at the time was loud, untraditional, boisterous. And when the band cranked out a song, he stood stiff in his spot. It was clear that he did not enjoy the loud music. Yet, he prevailed. Every week. With wife and grandkids in tow.

Eventually I asked him what he was doing here. Deep down, I was wondering whether he realised that there was a more traditional style of worship just ten kilometres down the road.

I will always remember his answer. "I don't really like it here. But my grandchildren do. And, while I failed in passing on the faith to my own children, I don't want to mess up again. How can I not do whatever it takes to help my grandkids grow encounter Jesus' love?"

That conversation happened 20 years ago. Today, that grandfather still worships. And still in that same church. And when I last visited, he even appeared to enjoy it – well, the slower, more mellow songs anyway! But more importantly, his grandchildren are now actively involved in that church. One even plays in the band. And over time, his own children have come back too!

I am not suggesting that every Lutheran church needs to invest in a bank of subwoofers and mood lighting. God's

church grows through relationship: God's relationship toward us. Our relationship toward others. But the fourth step of becoming a missional church is to face the cost of change. It is to

- reflect on what is working and what is not
- take risks
- live as though every problem is a possibility for new life
- and explore new ways of doing things.

Kennon Callahan used to say, "if you're digging a hole in the wrong spot, it doesn't matter how big you dig it, it will still be in the wrong spot".

In the Lutheran Church we have amazing theology. Indeed, our theology on grace is second to none. Knowing that it is always about God coming to us, giving to us, loving us, forgiving us – despite our living our lives as 'a one finger salute' – is what drives us to be places where 'love comes to life' and where we engage people with God's love in everyday life.

People are worth it!

- 1. Do you consider your church a risk taker? What evidence is there?*
- 2. What people might God be inviting your church to invest in? How might you do that?*

## Towards a Missional Church - Living as Community

*They were in each other's face. From the very first moment. Always arguing. Never agreeing. And it was uncomfortable for all around. It felt like the community was being torn apart. "Could someone please just tell them both to be quiet".*

Has that been your experience of community? Sometimes it is. Mostly, we avoid confrontation like the plague. But just for a moment, consider that this behaviour could simply reflect the carrying on of a religious family (Jacob and Esau), or of two disciples (James and John), or a discussion by two evangelists (Paul and Barnabas)!

In 1987, M Scott Peck described the process towards authentic community.

**Pseudocommunity** – which is all about conflict avoidance

**Chaos** – where conflict avoidance fails and the first reaction is to try and fix, heal or convert those bringing up issues

**Emptiness** – the process of emptying the ego. It is the stage of being “crucified with Christ” and dying to self and one’s own agenda

**True Community** – where people truly start to value the gift of difference that everyone brings. This is where relationships are truly nurtured.

The fifth step towards growing a missional church is to work towards having church operate as community (rather than functioning as a club or a religious

organisation). Healthy churches always care about relationships. They know that often, true community begins through small groups – where people can feel accepted and safe to be true to themselves and to others.

But true community is more than that. We live forgiving and forgiven, as well as giving and given. We live in the certain knowledge that as Christ has forgiven us, we forgive others... and as Christ was given to us, we give ourselves to others; our gifts, our experiences and our faith journeys.

Missional churches, therefore, ask at least two questions...

Who do I need to forgive?

To whom can I give?

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35 (NIV)*

- 1. Using M Scott Peck’s ‘authentic community’ model, what stage would you describe your community?*
- 2. Would you describe your community as open or closed? Why/why not?*
- 3. What might a loving community look like?*

## **Towards a Missional Church – Making Room for All**

*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'* (Luke 7:34, NIV)

To what extent does your church community look like the community in which it lives?

In 2014, Church consultant, Thom Rainer, released a book called *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*. In it he explored the common factors among churches in the USA that had died. One of those factors, common among all the churches that had died, was “Refusing to Look Like the Community”. That didn’t mean that they refused to adopt the social standards of the local community... but it meant that these churches that had died, had ceased to ‘be a friend of tax collectors and sinners’. Or put another way, instead of going into the community, they expected the community to come to them!

Missional churches make room for all.

They welcome newcomers no matter whether their surname is Schmidt or Smith.

They focus on the hearts of children and young people, paying whatever price it costs to ensure that those people are nurtured and disciple in the faith.

They celebrate questions, and questioning of the faith, and questioning of why things are done the way they are done... and they make changes to those things if required.

And they celebrate diversity; their attitude to each other celebrates their confidence in the gospel – that God himself has embraced them ‘just as they are without one plea’, so they embrace those who come from different social and ethnic backgrounds, or have different mental or physical abilities.

And they celebrate these differences as strength.

Where does strength lie in your community?

- 1. Where does strength lie in your community?*
- 2. Would you say that all are welcome? What stories can you share that demonstrate that?*
- 3. In what ways do our differences strengthen our community?*

## **Towards a Missional Church – Do a Few Things, and do them well**

Francis de Sales became Bishop of Geneva some 60 years after Martin Luther's death. He was known for his deep faith (trust in God's goodness) and his gentle approach to dealing with the religious divisions brought about by the Protestant Reformation. Who he was was, and how he lived, very much shaped by his own journey. Early in his life he became overwhelmed, even to the point of physical and emotional dis-ease and distress, until he came to the conclusion, that if God is love, then God must only have good in store for him.

It was Francis de Sales who said, *"It is far better to do a few things well than to undertake many good works and leave them half done."*

This leads to the final habit of a healthy, missional church. A healthy church does a few things and does them well. A healthy church is focussed, rather than frenetic.

Focussed, rather than frenetic.

Many young people are caught up in that world of being frenetic. FOMO controls them. They try to cram as much as they can into their day. They are constantly on social media, finding out what others are doing. They suffer from that modern day disease – Fear Of Missing Out.

Maybe we all do. Including those of us in the church.

So who are we? We are a missional church. That was Jesus' command in Matthew 28. Over the last seven fortnights, we have looked at 7 Marks of a Healthy Church (based on a book on the same title)

- Energised by faith (rather than just trying to survive)
- Outwardly focussed (considering all of life, not just church life)
- Seeks God (rather than trying to please everyone)
- Faces the cost of change (rather than resisting change and fearing failure)
- Is community (rather than a club or religious organisation)
- In inclusive (makes room for all)
- Does a few things and does them well (focussed rather than frenetic)

We are called to be involved in mission. That is our one task. We are called to be God's grace, love and mercy into the communities in which we live. Remember that. It does not require lots of money. It does not require complicated programmes. It requires one thing... When asked by the Pharisees, Jesus explained that one thing well...

*“Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*  
(Matthew 22:37–40, NIV)

What would our communities of witness and service look like, if, energised by what God has done for us, we lived outwardly in love and service towards others?