



**Bishop Richard Ellena
Charge to Synod 2014**

'Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church'

What happens when the Spirit speaks to the Church through the hopes and dreams of a group of young adults – considering that this is the age group missing in our Churches today?

How well do we hear what the Spirit is saying through them?

And, even more importantly, what do we do with what we hear?

I felt challenged a few months ago to do something slightly different in this year's charge. Instead of casting *my* vision and *my* hopes for what we might focus on in the coming year, I invited 10 young adults to meet with me over three evenings and talk to me about the Church as they experience it and the Church that they long for. I invited about 15 or 16, but some were unavailable for the meetings. I tried to get both an age and gender balance, representing the churches around Nelson. One of them has Anglican roots but is currently not worshipping in an Anglican Church. Another one worships in a cooperating venture that has strong links to the Diocese; while the other eight are all in local Anglican Churches. They ranged in age from late teens to late thirties and in their personal situations: One is in his last year at school, two are students, two are stay-at-home Mums, two are lawyers two are exploring ministry and one is a social worker. But they had a couple of things in common: they each had a deep personal faith in Jesus and they had a passion for the Church as the Body of Christ.

I gave them permission to feel safe to be honest in their responses, and they in turn gave me permission to place a digital recorder in the middle of the table and record our sessions together and I came away from each of these meetings inspired and challenged.

What I am sharing this morning are the hearts of these ten young adults – their vision of the Church. I think it will be obvious when I am quoting from their personal comments but I won't be identifying any individuals by their comments.

We began each evening in prayer so, in a very real way – 'hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church'.

I guess I didn't expect the sense of unanimity that came from my very first question to them. They are committed Church attendees so the question

seemed to be a logical starting point – Why are you in the Church? Why do you go to Church?

With only one exception the answer was **community**.

- “I love going to Church – being part of a Church – being part of a community, part of God’s family: gathering together to interact and support and encourage each other – to be a part of each other’s lives as together we draw closer to God and find ourselves transformed by God.”
- “The community aspect is number one for me. I see the Church in all its fullness as ‘the light of the world’. We have children now and believe that it’s in this community that they are discipled and grow in their relationship with Jesus.”
- “Absolutely community – this is a big one. A place of deep worship where we join with others in praising God.”

Only one disagreed. This person said that they are quite traditional and like hymns and communion and they find that when they are in a more liturgical service it makes sense out of the chaotic, hard stuff they are experiencing throughout the week and they come out feeling refreshed.

I’ll come back to this shortly. But this same person arrived at our second meeting and said that actually it *is* community they are searching for – but they are not experiencing it where they are worshipping, but they stay there for the sacred security of the formal.

However, back to that first meeting and the discussion on community, because it suddenly went down to a deeper level.

- “When I think of the Church – it’s not just Sunday. It’s the kick-off or ending of a week. Having involvement with one another during the week. This builds relationships and it’s the relationships that build authentic community.”

And then someone else nailed it.

- “Community is not necessarily something that just happens on Sunday. It has to be worked at. The Church must be strategic otherwise it won’t happen. Sunday for us was gathering at the park after Church with whomever, then back to Church in the evening. It was a whole day commitment, but by the end of the day we felt like community.”

One of the younger ones present described this very clearly:

- “What drew me into relationship with God was relationship first through the community of the Church; people who were intentional with me as

to keep me coming, texting me, encouraging me. And they were keen to hear my story – they showed interest. Stories are the foundation of community.”

One other person put it so simply:

- “They showed that they believed in me.”

For these young adults the primary quality that drew them, or holds them, in a Church is community – authentic community that is nurtured through relationships. But they acknowledge that these relationships don’t happen by chance, we have to be strategic (and genuine) in the way we welcome visitors and the way we integrate.

And then came the challenge: these relationships will more effectively happen if the leader is a relational person – if they see it modelled in the hospitality of the leadership.

What is our Church’s - what is your Church’s strategy for building community?

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Our conversations often came back to a discussion about **discipleship** and this was the second evident theme in our gathering that I want to share with you this morning. These young adults were so clear that they wanted to be part of a Church that was obviously passionate about journeying *with* people as they discovered God and understood more about Him and experienced more of Him. Their prayer for the Church has echoes of Paul who, in his prayer for the Ephesians wrote, *‘I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you might know him better.* The word ‘know’ as used in this passage is a deep and intimate experience of God – it is far more than simply knowing *about* God.

These young adults were crystal clear in their belief that, as in all the Gospel accounts, an encounter with Jesus transformed people. Whether it was through healing or forgiveness, or just simply acceptance, people were changed. For these young adults, personal transformation, in and through Jesus, is the goal of discipleship and the greatest testimony to the truth and reality of God.

Some of them expressed it through frustration:

- “People come along to Church carrying all sorts of burdens and baggage and it seems, far too often, that they leave our worship carrying those same loads – nothing seems to have changed.”
- “Why is there so little discipleship happening? If we want people to know about God how’s it going to happen? Do we wait for someone else to tell them?”

And here’s the crunch; they are drawn to a Church where they can see lives being changed.

Their threefold recipe for strategic discipleship is very simple:

1. Prayer: they wonder why there is not more prayer happening – individually and corporately. One person commented that if there was someone, or some group, within their church praying for people to come to know Christ and to a deeper commitment in him they were totally unaware of it.
2. The confidence and courage to share our own stories – however simple they might be. These young adults know the power of testimony. For them it is a very natural expression of what Jesus promised to the disciples when he told them (from Acts 1) that *‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes and you will be ‘my witnesses.....’*

Thirdly, and most importantly for them.....

3. Intentional mentoring. One of those present spoke about his own experience of having been mentored within a Church that has been very strategic in developing mentoring as its primary form of discipleship. As he put it:
 - “Jesus disciplined the twelve – he invested into them and through them he touched the many. Two people were encouraged by the leadership to take me under their wing! And now with these two mentors I have intentional ‘me’ time where they look into my life and help me to grow. We have small ‘invest groups’ but it’s in this mentoring where I was, and am disciplined – and, incidentally, where I was drawn into the fellowship of this Church – into community.”

He went on to add....

- “This is *not* common among the older members of the congregation who prefer their life group. But it is critical for us.”

One of those present wrote to me after the second session. She said:

- I also really liked the idea that was discussed last week with having the mentor system up and down (being mentored *by* somebody and in turn

mentoring someone younger – in age or in faith). I can personally advocate for having someone I look up to as a mentor, who has mentored me in such a way, she may not even know that that is what she has done over the past two years, but I have benefitted greatly as a result.'

It was summed up by a simple comment by one of them

- 'We are here because someone older invested in our lives.'

None of this is new – it might not have been called 'mentoring' in the past but this has always been the model for effective discipleship – just look back at the example of Paul and Timothy. So when did we drop the ball – how did we lose our confidence?

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These young adults were sharing something quite profound and I sense that if we fail to hear it then we fail to catch the wind of the Spirit in our Churches.

They want to grow.

They want, in turn, to encourage others to grow.

And once again, they left me with a challenge. They looked at the incredible wealth that is in our Church – the older folk who are, and have been, so faithful in their commitment to the Church over so many years. And these young adults expressed a deep disappointment that this potential has never been intentionally tapped. Consequently many of these older folk have grown up thinking that their faith is a private thing and they have nothing to share while, on the other hand, these young adults are so hungry to tap into the wisdom that is just – in some respects – going to waste. Can this be a personal challenge to each Synod member – who are you mentoring/discipling? Because the reality is that if those in leadership aren't doing it, the Church won't be!

Is discipling something that we hope will happen, quite by chance, through a Sunday sermon or in a Bible Study group?

These young adults seemed to suggest that we need to be far more intentional – that it doesn't happen by chance.

And if it is not happening, they will look for somewhere where it is!

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The Corporate Worship of the Church

At the beginning of our third evening together I thought I'd revisit a question I asked at our first meeting. If you were moving to a new town what are the two or three things you'd look for in a Church?

Here are some of their answers.

- Community (as already mentioned)
- A place where you know others (another way of describing community.....)
- Good teaching
- Meaningful worship
- An Anglican Church (now that one surprised me!)
- A place for kids and family
- A local Church – I want to be part of the local community
- A church with a social justice focus – one that cares about the problems in the world
- Authenticity of the leader / the leadership

I must admit to being somewhat surprised. I was certain that music (or the lack of it) would feature fairly highly in here - considering how important music is within the contemporary culture, but it was hardly mentioned – at any point over the three evenings. Of course, 'meaningful' and 'deep' worship all refer to music and its impact on our worship. It was just kind of accepted that music is an integral part of worship and didn't need to be considered outside of that framework. I guess that there is a bit of a challenge to those of us who think that if we simply bring in the guitars and sing some modern songs, young people will flock in through our doors.

As you can possibly imagine however, this question opened up a wide-ranging discussion among them on the current practices of our Sunday worship. Some preferred the more liturgical while others preferred something more free and contemporary, but they all agreed that they wanted songs with decent theology!

Neither was there agreement on service times. Those with young children pleaded for an earlier start. As they said, 'our kids have been up since six – we feel like we've done a whole day before we get to Church!' While some of the younger singles said, 'don't you dare get us out of bed any earlier on Sunday'.....

However, when the idea of a late afternoon (4.30pm) service was raised – a creative new service beginning with a shared meal, followed by children’s ministry and adult worship – finishing by 6.30pm so Mums and Dads could get the kids home to bed - lights went on all around the room.

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Back to where I started this section....

As they reflected on what they would look for in a Church, **good, biblical preaching** was high on the list - in fact they came back to it several times over the three evenings. They were positive about their experience here in the Diocese: they appreciated preaching that ‘puts a passage into its context with the whole of scripture’; preaching that ties the message back to the Cross – back to Christ’. But they were pretty much in agreement that there was something missing - as good as it was, it often failed to scratch where they were itching.

One of those present put it this way:

- “Preaching must touch the head *and* the heart. I really appreciate the teaching that explains a passage clearly, but also then goes one step further and gives us, the listeners a ‘takeaway’. What do I ‘takeaway’ from a sermon? How have I personally been challenged or uplifted or touched by this sermon? I sometimes feel this last step is missed out, and instead of something thought-provoking for me to apply to my daily life, I come away thinking that that was a good history lesson, or analysis, but that is it?”

Paul certainly encourages the Romans to *‘be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**’* but he also prays for the Ephesians that *‘the eyes of your **heart** might be enlightened.’* These young adults are passionate about seeing lives transformed by Jesus. They themselves are committed to becoming more and more like Christ – allowing the fruit of the Spirit (as John Stott prayed daily) to ripen in their lives. And they want Church to be a place where they experience ‘transformative’ preaching – not just ‘informative.’

I asked them the obvious question: so what makes the difference for you – how do you define ‘transformative’ preaching?

Five immediate responses.....

1. It will be relevant: is the preacher aware of the issues that we are facing?

- “The sermon is biblically based but it doesn’t seem to relate to life today. Questions that I have don’t get answered – they don’t even seem to get addressed.”

I have a list of some of their big questions attached as an appendix to this charge - everything from why does God allow suffering, to questions about sexuality and judgement....

2. It will be authentic: There will be a transparent honesty in the preaching so that we understand that what we are hearing is something that comes out of the preacher’s struggle to understand or interpret the passage or the theme within the context of their own life as well.
3. It will have an application: ‘It will contain stories and illustrations that switch on the lights for me - it will help me understand what I need to do or change and offer me an opportunity, or show me a way to respond.’
4. It will be passionate. This one lead to quite a discussion:
 - “If the preacher is ‘fired up’ about Jesus he or she should be able to convey that. We want to hear people who are contagious for God. I don’t think there’s enough ‘fire in the bellies’ of those who are preaching. In answer to your question (*another question I asked the group*) I would take my friends to a fired-up Church.”
 - “Have we lost that passion? We have every hope in Jesus, but sometimes it feels that we have lost it – it’s not evident to others.”
 - “I’m not sure that it’s lost – I suspect it gets quenched by the busyness of life around us.”

Maybe we just need to be reminded of something Charles Spurgeon said back in the 19th century when he spoke of ‘spirit and truth’ as being ‘fire and light.’ *‘In the pulpit’* he said *‘there must be light as well as fire. Some preachers are all light and no fire, while others are all fire and no light. What we need is both fire and light.’*

5. It should enable and facilitate response or dialogue: a message that invites questions and a structure that facilitates it. Tim Keller, from Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York – a highly respected preacher and author always has a forum following his services so young people can gather and ask questions of him, questions generated by his sermon.

One of the young adults asked,

- Is there room to question – how safe are we if we do so?

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Inevitably, when discussing the Church they would be looking for: the topic of leadership was raised – not just the ordained leader but to leadership

generally. This is probably a theme best addressed at a leadership conference or a clergy retreat rather than Synod, but can I simply place before you the three values that stood out for them as being critical.

1. Authenticity
2. Credibility
3. Integrity

These three values kept getting repeated in different contexts throughout the three evenings we had together and probably I could have devoted my entire Charge to teasing them out. They are also the three lenses through which they assess the Church as an institution.

One thing you very quickly learn about this generation – they are deeply concerned about what is happening in the world around them and in the issues facing our local communities – social justice is high on their agenda. But they are also highly sceptical about an institution’s ability (or even its desire) to seriously confront these issues. Certainly the level of cynicism surrounding the last election and low turnout of voters from this age group is a reflection of this scepticism.

So, while most of these young adults are worshipping in an Anglican Church at the moment, very few would identify as being ‘Anglican’ – they would simply say ‘we are Christians’ - because to do otherwise would identify them with an institution rather than a vision; and the Anglican Church is an institution par excellence as Synod members are only too aware!

The Bishop of Wellington, Bishop Justin Duckworth addressed all these same issues in a very powerful address to his Synod a couple of weeks ago. And at the end of it he asked a somewhat rhetorical question – Is the Spirit doing something new and has the Anglican Church come to the end of the road? In a very moving answer to his own question he offers reasons why he still firmly believes that the Anglican Church has a future.

Show clip from Bishop Justin’s charge.

But we still have this credibility gap. Folks, we are in a new place as a Church. Although we will all have a few young adults in our Churches on Sunday, as a group the under 50’s are missing from our churches. This group does not want to belong to an institution but they do want to belong relationally to a people gathered around the table of God. We have a credibility gap and things have to change.

One of those present emailed me following our final meeting with an article that sums up something of how they feel - and why they struggle with the institutionalisation of the Church. (I have also attached the article as an appendix to the written copy of this charge). It describes a vital, dynamic kind of organisation (which it calls a 'movement') that is marked by an attractive, clear, unifying vision for the future, together with a strong set of values and beliefs. And then contrasts it with 'institutionalised organisations' that seem to be held together by rules, regulations and procedures – rather than by a shared vision.

How much of what we are about to do at Synod is focussed on vision and how much on regulations and procedures? Our structures need to change but our culture as a church needs to change as well. The way we are 'being' Church will affect the way we 'do' Church – not necessarily the other way around.

How much time in Vestry meetings is spent discussing vision and how much is spent maintaining structures? Are our parishes more concerned about how we might bring young people to Jesus or whether we should keep the pews! Sorry folks, but in my first year in the Diocese (22 years ago), I sat in our Diocesan Conference and heard the Bishop of Chester – Bishop Michael Baughan - start his keynote address with the prophetic challenge, "Burn the pews!"

Is there any sense in which we might have kept the pews and lost a generation? Please don't spend the rest of Synod worrying about pews – I'm simply making a point that a missional vision will have us deeply concerned about how we might respond to the questions these young adults have about the Church. They want our Churches to be local Churches with a global vision passionate about and involved in the issues facing our world and our communities, challenging those who have the authority and power to make a difference and responding in acts of loving service when they don't.

In the bridge passage to her song 'Hosanna', Brooke Fraser sings these words:

'Break my heart for what breaks yours
Everything I am for your Kingdom's cause.'

Jesus said,

'Blessed are those who mourn.....'

In the past months of travelling around the Diocese I've heard very little intercessory prayer for our communities and our world – and in a couple of

places absolutely no intercessory prayer at all (about anything)! And yet one of the members of the group emailed me after our second meeting:

- I totally support the comments made about more prayer in Church; prayer for others and for the world. In this world of 'selfies' it is essential to look outside of us as individuals and pray for a multitude of things well beyond our daily lives....

These young adults want to hear the Church praying for the world for those countries caught in the grip of Ebola, for the hostages being held by ISIS, for the rising anti-Semitism in the West and the pain of the Palestinians in the East, for child poverty here, and the increasing levels of isolation and marginalisation, for those who are spiritually searching and looking for a place to belong.

She also added in an afterthought,

- It is also powerful to have someone pray for you during a service or after a service.

Has the energy spent maintaining an institution made us immune to responding to the world beyond us? If we are not praying what are we actually doing?

Three words that motivate and mobilise this group: Authenticity, Credibility, Integrity.

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Finally, this group of young adults want to be part of making a difference in our Church. They bounced off one another within five minutes of our first gathering and some of them had not met any, or all of the others. Imagine what would happen, they asked, if we could get together occasionally.

Someone commented:

- It would be so good to get together – all of us. As it is, we are all parts of the body but it's not unified. We may know *of* one another, but we don't really know *about* one another.

There was a great deal of energy to having an evening service four or five times a year that brought together the whole Diocese for an all-age celebration - or maybe one in the Cathedral paralleled in Nativity (Marlborough) and Holy Trinity (Mawhera).

These young people saw us starting at 4.30pm with a combined picnic in the Cathedral grounds – with a bouncy castle for the kids (my thought). Music at 5.30pm and a kid’s programme and a service for adults that contained praise, message, discussion, prayer, communion in a way that shows the best of Anglican Creativity. All finished by 6.30pm so the kids can get home to bed.

Two of those present wrote to me really excited by this idea. One said:

- “I’d like to get involved and try to help organise such a service – something that can pack the service on Sunday evenings. We talked a lot about it the first time we met and it has been playing on my mind since.”

The word that kept getting repeated was celebration. These young adults want a time of celebration that inspires them and builds them for the ministry back in their local church.

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That same person who I quoted a few moments ago also wrote this in her email to me:

- “My wish for God’s Church is that it reassumes its role as a beacon in the wider community; that it becomes **the** refuge in this scary, confusing and harsh world, while remaining a place of jubilant, joyful, infectious and welcoming worship.”

Let me allow these young adults to have the final word.

Play the video.

‘Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church’!

Appendix

The big questions....

The following just some of the big questions or themes they have that never seem to get answered in our churches:

- Heaven
- Why does God allow suffering?
- Does being good get you into heaven?
- What does being a Christian really mean?
- Who is Jesus
(really basic stuff – they commented)
- Homosexuality
- Depression
- Mental Health
- Addictions
- Living together before marriage
- Christians' bad reputation
- Are Christians inconsistent?
- Tarnished reputations....

'Movement' versus 'Institution'

The word 'movement' is often used to describe a kind of vital, dynamic human organization, in order to distinguish it from what are called 'institutions.'

A movement is marked by an attractive, clear, unifying vision for the future together with a strong set of values or beliefs. The content of the vision must be compelling and clear so that others can grasp it readily. It must not be so esoteric or difficult that only a handful of people can articulate it. Instead, it must be something that all members of the movement can understand and pass along to others. By contrast, "institutionalized" organizations are held together by rules, regulations, and procedures, not by a shared vision.

This unifying vision is so compelling that it takes pride of place.

First, the vision leads to sacrificial commitment. Individuals put the vision ahead of their own interests and comfort. They are willing to work without high compensation, power, or perks. The satisfaction of realized goals is their main compensation.

Second, the vision leads to generous flexibility. Institutionalized organizations are very turf conscious. Members are suspicious of anyone encroaching on their

area of responsibility. Positions and power have been hard-won and jealously guarded. In movements, however, the accomplishment of the vision is more important than power and position. So people are willing to make allies, be flexible, and cooperate with anyone sharing the basic vision and values.

Third, the vision leads to innovativeness. Institutions are organized more vertically, where ideas from “below” are unwelcome. Movements are flatter because the commonly shared vision unifies and empowers.

Finally, a movement is marked by spontaneous generativity. It is able to generate its own resources, recruit its own new members and participants, and (especially) raise up its own new leaders - the vision of the movement attracts people with leadership potential.

David Hurst, a Harvard scholar, summed up how movements become institutions this way – vision becomes strategy, roles become tasks, teams become structure, networks become organizations, recognition becomes compensation. It is wrong, however, to draw such a hard line between the two forms. The reality is more complex.

It is natural for new churches and ministries to try very hard to stay informal, non-codified, and non-centralized. But part of what makes a movement dynamic is a unified vision, and that always requires some codification and control. A movement that refuses to take on some organizational characteristics – authority, tradition, unity of belief, and quality control – will fragment and dissipate. But an institution that fails to articulate a clear vision and embrace the creative vibrancy that flows from it will lose its vitality and effectiveness as well. The challenge is to guide the ship safely between these two opposite perils.

Discussion / Reflection

The following summarises the key ideas that came from the discussions with these young adults:

1. Community / relationship
2. Discipleship: Transformation
Mentoring
3. Leadership: Authenticity
Credibility
Integrity
4. Worship: Preaching
Relevant
Authentic
Application
Passionate
Discussion / Dialogue
Intercession
5. Structure: Movement or Institution
6. Celebration:

- *Please take 10 minutes and consider each of them quietly reflecting on the dreams and thoughts of the young adults who shared them.*
- *Make one positive comment for change or discussion on each of the points*
- *Please move into parish groups and share the comments you have written on each of the points.*
- *Each parish to identify three areas of change or challenge that comes out of these discussions*