

## General Synod Mission Breakfast Talk 2016



I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to allow your mind to bring forth as many answers large and small to that question. Are you ready? What do you **value**?

Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. What you value, is an integral part of what you build your life on – your principles, your foundations.

Throughout the Bible, and here I reference Psalm 97, God's foundation, or the foundation of his throne or his Lordship is righteousness and justice. Righteousness is understood here as right living and **right relationships**. And without them, there can be no justice.

With that as our base, The Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation

If I were to summarise those our mission is restoration of right relationships. Right relationships with ourselves, with others, with God and with creation. That is our mission.

And so mission becomes a **lifestyle** of right relationships, a series of choices founded on values that create habits, a decision to be wholly responsive – not just as a donor or as an evangelist – to a God of right relationships and justice. It is a life of Shalom – of right relationships.

## Justice is Right Relationships

- Tzadeqah can be translated as “being just” or “being righteous,” and it refers to a life of right relationships.
- “Biblical righteousness is inevitably ‘social,’ because it is about relationships.”  
Tim Keller

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If mission is a lifestyle then it involves us asking ourselves daily: ‘How can I live to love God and love others?’ How can I live a life of doing to others as I would have done to me? and ‘how can I live simply so that others can simply live?’ We were made for interconnection, we were made for interdependence. God designed us that way. Our lifestyles must reflect that reality. Do we value our role as consumers and hoarders and accumulators more than our role as humans or Christians?

I was chatting to several people who work for mission agencies and asked them what mission is ALL of them spoke of mission as **journeying** together along the way as **companions**. I read a great article recently about university students in Kampala Uganda being so moved by gun violence and mass shootings that they –planned to apply for visas, move to the States, set up an NGO and lobby for gun reform. American students were asked what they thought of such actions. The responses were that the concerns were sweet and well-intentioned but ultimately ignorant as the issue was so much more complex than the Ugandan students realised. Yet, this is exactly how Western countries and churches have responded to complex problems overseas for decades! But here, as I chatted with mission agencies, the imagery of the Road to Emmaus was being evoked: In journeying together we discover Jesus. But they also spoke of mission being something that takes place and is rooted in its own context – there is no 1 size fits all. So when we explore the Church of Ireland’s relationship to

mission – we do mission in our own context and we walk alongside those doing mission in overseas contexts and in doing so we discover together more about Jesus.

Tearfund gave this wonderful example of how journeying with others allows great things to happen:



Although the media is not giving it much attention, there has been a slow onset drought and resulting famine in the horn of Africa. The authoritative Famine Early Warning system has been using a figure of 15 million for Ethiopia alone. Also Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya are affected. Various regions are in a state of Emergency (IPC Phase 4), meaning that they are unable to access adequate food for survival and face an increased risk of malnutrition and mortality.” This is just one step away from famine.

And the situation is *complex*. The Port of Djibouti, through which most foreign grain must flow, is unlikely to be able to handle the volumes. “It manages usually around 500,000 tons per month. Can it deal with an additional 2 million tons, and with what kinds of delay?” Ethiopia’s natural gateways to the sea are closed as they are Eritrean ports which have lain idle since the border war between the two countries (1998 – 2000).

Ethiopia’s “biblical” famines of 1973 – 74 and 1984 – 85 left hundreds of thousands dead, probably around 200,000 and 400,000 respectively. Since the first of these tragedies, the population of Ethiopia has quadrupled – from around 26 million in 1973 to around 100 million today. Highland farms (tiny patches of land, eroded by decades of intensive agriculture and subdivided down the generations) can barely feed a family in the best of times.

Even in normal years some 7 or 8 million Ethiopians require international food aid to survive. This year el-Nino and the drought it has brought has exacerbated the situation. But these droughts are cyclical and it was inevitable. For Ethiopia, the picture is not entirely negative. The country has enjoyed rapid economic growth in recent years. The authorities have greater resources to draw

upon. And Ethiopia recently signed a border agreement with Kenya that could allow increased aid to be brought in by road. But no one should underestimate the impact of the drought and the looming threat of famine. There are warnings that the humanitarian caseload could exceed the Syrian crisis.

Self Help Groups that were set up by local Tearfund staff in 2002 and that have the local churches at the heart of their organisation and expansion have become a source of support for each other during the drought. Over 12,000 groups affecting over 1 million people in 2 districts who have built resilience over several years (funds have been saved, grain stores built, drought resistant crops grown) and there is shared wisdom as they advise each other as a network on surviving this drought. You cannot tell me, that a visible church, rolling up its sleeves to serve the community and prepare the community for crisis is not a beautiful example of mission and we walked alongside, by supporting them and Tearfund in that process. And we can learn from them.

That is just 1 example of local mission with which we have partnered. We are journeying with them as they respond in their context by bringing the practical Good News of the Gospel, of a life of flourishing and transformation, even amidst hardship and suffering. If your parish or diocese is not journeying with companions from around the world in this form of mission and support of mission, can I suggest to you explore that possibility. Can I also repeat that we cannot know the fullness of Christ without discovering him together with 'all the saints.' We need each other.

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Now I want to focus on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> marks of mission – transforming unjust structures, challenging violence and safeguarding the integrity of creation. Systems and structure built on broken relationships – on abusing power, on exploiting the majority of the world instead of nurturing them – on looking for ways to benefit the few regardless of who suffers, demanding choice and comfort regardless of whose backs are broken or who is enslaved to obtain these wants and comforts – these systems and structures are not glorifying God, are not giving life, are not allowing fullness of life and human flourishing, are not doing to the others as we would like done to the Self. So then we must say that these systems are dysfunctional and will and DO breed injustice. They are in direct contradiction to the Lordship of God – right relationship – there can be no justice without right relationships.

Our economic systems globally are weighted in favour of the rich and the powerful. They often take God's intended design for interconnection and interdependence and distort them to create disconnection with the only connections are exploitation for personal gain.

Will we ignore the call to be a thorn in the flesh, to have a prophetic rage about such injustices occurring right in front of us – the vast accumulation of wealth and tax breaks and exploitation of workers, the destruction and pollution of creation and the loss of homes and land and livelihoods because of shady landgrabs for cash crops and mining, zero contract hours and greed and hoarding of the 1%?

As a Church will we speak out even when we know that we benefit from these systems and the transformation of them will be costly to us?

Will we speak truth to power even if it is unpopular and even if we don't feel our own house is in order?

Will we mobilise to take action for the rights of the majority of the world who are oppressed and dispossessed? And will we persist in our mission, even as things are slow to change and make it a lifestyle choice to live in solidarity with the poor and the suffering?

This is what it means to be the Church. This is what it means to be followers of Christ. This is what it means to be caught up in God's mission and not busying ourselves with our own agendas.

'Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the binds that enslave, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?' Isaiah 58:6

The EU spends 11 billion on icecream per year whilst the global economy spends only 6 billion on access to basic education. We in the West waste almost same amount of food each year that the entire continent of Africa produces – approx. 222 million tonnes/230 million tonnes. And when I learnt that fact I was began to explore where we grow this food that we waste – much of it is in developing countries on land that has been acquired by very corrupt deals – making entire communities homeless and exporting for supermarket chains when countries grown in are in drought or food insecurity – much of it to rot in our fridges, to be thrown out of our restaurants and supermarkets. And then we send funds to the landless communities struggling with food security. It's not about being paupers, it's about being intentional consumers – and multinationals are complex and difficult to trace but as we become more intentional, the market must reflect what we want.

A request for funding was granted by Bishops' Appeal for a project in Zambia that aimed identify people in several communities, bring them together, form co-ops and produce peanut butter and sunflower oil. The goal of the projects was to see these families be able to earn \$1 per day and be food secure for 6 months of the year. It is difficult not to be moved by such levels of destitution and respond. At the same time, the Irish Times published an article about sugar tax deals in Zambia. Large multinational corporations route their profits through the IFSC in Dublin to avail of Ireland's tax breaks for big corporations and pay virtually no tax in Zambia. This is literally and legally siphoning millions of euro worth of taxes the Zambian Government could use for social reform to the pockets of the already wealthy and powerful. We cannot just respond to the destitution, we must be willing to respond to the unjust systems and structures that perpetuate the destitution. We are a Church that is known for what it is against; it's time we stood up and spoke out about what we are FOR – we are for the marginalised, the vulnerable and the voiceless. We are for justice and for the restoration of right relationships as foundations for our global systems and structures.



There are Christian campaigns for tax justice, for fairer tax policies globally that curb the power of massive corporations and billionaires and ensure they pay fair taxes that can be used for social reform in countries. There are campaigns against Gender based violence, against unfair trade deals and trade policies, against exploitation of labour in the garment industry. Anglican Alliance has links to many and by the end of the Summer Bishops' Appeal website will to. – we can add our voices and our intentional consumerism to those causes.

'Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.' Dietrich Bonhoeffer who also said that we are not simply to bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.'

Not another meeting, not another empathetic sermon, not another theology of compassion. Action

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Currently when we talk about speaking out and taking action, nothing is more prevalent in our minds than the refugee crisis. The global refugee crisis has now grown to 60 million people worldwide – over half are children, 86% of whom are living or surviving in developing countries. 6% are in Europe. There are 3 main categories of forced migrants: economic refugees, environmental refugees and war refugees. Most is human made disaster, destruction and destitution. It is the overwhelming but inevitable consequence of human activity. What is the Holy Spirit saying to us and asking of us in this defining issue of our time? Spirit of God who hovered over the waters and brought order out of chaos. The invisible but ever present participant in every encounter always prompting us to a higher calling, to a more sacrificial way of loving. So often, we ignore that prompting and choose self love, comfort and ease instead. We quieten and dampen and silence the prompting of the Spirit. The world sees people as having rights and status if they are a member of a

sovereign state and have citizenship. Those that don't have these credentials are being treated as 'illegal' and are being dehumanised and treated as less than human. The Holy Spirit is calling us to see those who are fleeing as having rights and status simply because they are humans made in the image and likeness of God. I believe He is also challenging us to look with fresh eyes at our own sense of deservedness, our own status and possessions, our own sense of entitlement. And to look beyond ourselves and beyond our own circles and our own boundaries to look for our brother, to look for our sister.



And so we speak out for the rights of the dispossessed. Christian Aid have examples of how you can do that available in the prayer room today. A press release went out to the Church regarding accommodation. Local parishes are engaging and collaborating with local refugee response community groups and I cited some examples in an article in Search which is coming out in June. United Society who were supported by Bishops' Appeal in their work on behalf of the diocese of Europe are here and can tell you about the ongoing work in Greece and Hungary. Tearfund and Christian Aid can speak of their work in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, which cannot be ignored – our attention cannot be diverted from the hub of the crisis when World Food Programme budget is less than half what it should be to keep people fed and alive. We can only ask that God expand the boundaries of our love. Other agencies such as CMS Ireland are responding to the global refugee crisis, not just the crisis in the middle east. Our welcome for the stranger remembers that Jesus reached out for the marginalised, the vulnerable, even the illegal and the undeserving and calls us to extend our boundaries of love in the same way.

Mission as relationship and the restoration of relationship. Mission as lifestyle and intentional living. Mission as journey in companionship with others. Mission as responding in our own context, speaking out to transform unjust systems and structures even if it is costly.

May we live a life of value. May the things we value be foundations on which we build strong lives of faith and action, free from hoarding and greed and selfishness and entitlement. May our lives be worthy of the calling we have received.

And may we be willing to engage regardless of the cost so that we can discover Jesus together.