



# Wakefield Ministry Scheme



**VISION BUILDING  
A Resource Pack for  
Churches**

**(3) Practical Tools**

GR C3

This booklet contains ideas for getting groups working on the practicalities of developing a vision for the church. Choose the one(s) most suited to your situation: you are not likely to need more than one or two. The material is adapted from Peter Brierley's **Vision Building**, chapter 5.

## SWOT Analysis

This is a simple exercise to do which is a version of the technique known as 'SWOT analysis', where SWOT stands for Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats. This version should help a group to relax and have fun as well as revealing useful information about their current situation, providing building blocks for vision and planning ahead. It will work best with a sizeable group such as a PCC or a church Open Meeting, so that participants can be split into smaller groups.

Prepare in advance a large tree cut out from stiff paper or card, which can be fixed to one wall of the room in which the meeting takes place. Also prepare a supply of differently coloured paper shapes representing apples, pears, blackbirds and maggots. You will need at least as many of each as you expect to have small groups at the session, plus an extra set to use at the end.

Divide the participants into groups of four to six people. Give each group one of each of the four coloured shapes. Explain these as follows:

*Apples* represent the strengths members of the group see in the life of the church as it now is.

*Pears* represent the real opportunities for mission and growth people can see in the parish context.

## Urgent / Important

The final tool in this set will be familiar to those who have used Time Management materials. If a vision-building process leads to a long list of actions and projects the church might take on, one way of determining where to begin is to work with this classification.

*Urgency* is about how soon or how quickly something needs to be done: some tasks cannot wait because they are a necessary condition of anything else getting done at all, for example.

*Importance* is about the likely value of the action to the church as a whole and in the longer term: some things can be bright ideas which actually don't deliver a lot of real benefit.

You therefore have four categories:

Low urgency, low importance: therefore not a priority at all unless or until you have the luxury of having done everything else

High urgency, low importance: pressing needs which don't amount to much in the bigger scheme of things but nevertheless can't be ignored- the trick is to get them out of the way as soon as possible and clear the decks

Low urgency, high importance: the items for your long-term agenda, part of the 'Mission Statement' which may not yet be translated into more precise measured objectives, but which must not be lost sight of

High urgency, high importance: the current priorities for careful planning and staged action- the place to get your working parties up and running, with a clear commitment to review progress in three to six months' time.

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## Invent a Motto

A more lighthearted way of devising a Vision or Mission Statement could be to let people's imagination run riot on inventing a motto for the church. This exercise could be done at the end of a session where most of the time has been taken up with one of the more factual types of investigation described in this resource material. The idea is to let everyone contribute off the top of their head to a bit of creative thinking. It might produce something the church could actually use, for example in a logo or on a letterhead, but it might just be fun for the group.

Examples might include:

Use of rhymes, such as 'Caring, Sharing, Daring' to describe your church;

A formula, such as

Growth = Praising + Learning + Belonging + Telling;

An acrostic, e.g. our church lives by

Fellowship,  
Action,  
Involvement,  
Transformation and  
Holiness;

A series of words describing the church's task as a process:

REACH      TEACH      BUILD      STAND

*Blackbirds* represent the threats to the church's health which people see as potentially coming from outside.

*Maggots* represent the weaknesses which might eat away at the church's life from within.

Each group can be given an hour to discuss the situation and decide what it wants to identify as its main apples, pears, blackbirds and maggots. (It is suggested that three or four of each would be ample!)

Then each group in turn is invited to come forward and pin or stick its apples, pears, blackbirds and maggots on to the tree, with an explanation of each item. When every group has done this, give people time to have a good look at the result, perhaps using a tea or coffee break for this.

After this has been done, reduce the lists on the apples, pears, blackbirds and maggots to a 'master list': firstly, by bringing together items that appear on more than one list. Where different groups have said something similar but not identical, see whether they are willing to agree that in effect they were saying the same thing.

Secondly, as a further option, where there are items remaining which only one group has come up with, have a discussion to try to decide whether or not those items should make the final 'master list'. When as much agreement as possible has been reached, remove the original shapes from the tree and replace them with the 'master' versions of each

shape. Give people time finally to have a good look at these and take them in. The apples, pears, blackbirds and maggots then become the building blocks for further thought and planning.

*Some questions to bear in mind when using these findings:*

*Apples* are your perceived areas of strength as a church. Are you building on them? People feel more confident where they are stronger: are you using your strengths as a starting-point from which to stretch and challenge people? Strengths that are not used constructively can sometimes go to seed.

*Pears* are the areas of opportunity you perceive in the parish or neighbourhood. Opportunities are there to be taken. What are the next practical steps you need to take in order to seize the opportunity you have identified? There may be a time element- sometimes the moment of opportunity passes.

*Blackbirds* are your perceived threats from outside. Can you do anything about these or are they factors beyond your control? Sometimes there is little point in fighting a battle which is already lost- but instead you might counter the threat by starting a fresh initiative in a different place.

*Maggots* are your internal weaknesses. Are you addressing these firmly? A chain cannot be stronger than the weakest link in it. How can you take on your area of greatest weakness and do something about it as a priority, so that everyone's morale gets a boost?

## Functions of the Church

This is a way of evaluating the church's life by analysing its activities under the headings of several key functions which all churches might be expected to perform. Here is one model:

### *Worship      Spiritual life*

These elements are principally about relating to *God*: in corporate worship services and personal prayer life

### *Teaching      Fellowship*

These elements are principally about relating to *each other* in learning and growing in faith and relationships

### *Evangelism      Service*

These elements are principally about relating to *the world* both in sharing faith and in serving the community

If the group is large enough, divide into smaller groups and give each one either one of these functions, or a pair, to look at. With regard to the church ask:

- 1) What are the key activities of the church in this area at the present time?
- 2) How might these have changed in five years time?
- 3) Why will they have changed- or if not, why not?

In this way people are asked not only to describe the present situation but challenged to evaluate it by imagining the future.

An alternative way of doing this exercise would be to ask, instead of 'what does your church *do*?' in these different areas, 'what does your church *have*?'

In other words, assess your resources rather than your activities. The question about how things will be in five years' time would still apply.

- Friendship and fun- e.g. youth group
- Efficiency and reliability- e.g. undertakers, diocesan office
- Beautiful environment- e.g. couples getting married
- Practical or financial support- e.g. charities, missionary societies

Whatever the categories you decide on, you can go on to see which feature most largely among the expectations of stakeholders. Together with the previous list of key stakeholders, this information too will feed into the process of putting practical flesh on the bones of your vision.

## Surveys and Trends

Select an area of your church's life about which to do a survey with a view to establishing trends. Often people think they know through circumstantial evidence or 'common sense' which way things are going. Hard facts and figures sometimes prove surprising. For example, children's work: conventional wisdom may say there was once a thriving Sunday School, the children came to church every Sunday, but now all this is declining because the parents don't bring them any more and there are too many other things to do on a Sunday. Are there records / archives to test this out? What do today's parents think? What is the perception of what the church has to offer for children? To carry out a proper survey:

- Get views from an unbiased sample (i.e. not just the people who will return a form handed out at church on Sunday)
- Get a big enough sample
- Aim for a good response rate (at least 50%, preferably 70%)
- Analyse the responses by various categories e.g. age, gender
- Put results in writing, circulate and invite discussion

In any survey which contains statistical information, it is important to identify the *trends*. This means not just presenting raw figures but breaking them down into significant variations. Anyone can see that the Sunday School is smaller than it used to be, but what more subtle changes are hidden beneath the figures? What about the proportion of younger to older children? The age at which children stop attending? The relation between children's attendance and that of their parents? The significance of a link with a local school? Contact with children measured in relation to size and age profile of the congregation as a whole? Evidence from child contact through church activities at other times than Sunday morning? Sound practical implications can only be drawn from adequate research.

## Models of the Church

Get people to score how they see the church by distributing a total of ten points among a choice of five models. Some possible models are given below, but you might want to edit them to produce your own. This can be a very interesting exercise to do with different groups: leaders in the church or people very much at the heart of things; the wider congregation; 'fringe' attenders; even non-churchgoing people in the parish at large, if you have a practicable way of reaching them. 'Seeing ourselves as other people see us' can be very revealing, but is often difficult for churches.

Here are some models you could use:

- Our church is a *Venerable Institution*. This means we see ourselves as maintaining a strong tradition. We value greatly the way we do things. Our church represents continuity and stability in a world of change.
- Our church is a *Business Enterprise*. This means we see ourselves as competing in the market-place. We set ourselves clear goals and take pride in delivering a quality product.
- Our church is a *Happy Family*. This means that our primary concern is the warmth and supportiveness of our relationships. We are welcoming and informal and want everyone to feel they belong.
- Our church is a *Spiritual Haven*. This means that we aim especially to provide what the secular world cannot. Worship, prayer and spirituality are our focus, to enrich the inner life.
- Our church is a *Centre of Excellence*. This means that we go for maximum impact and aim to attract from far and wide. We celebrate powerful preaching, excellent music or splendid surroundings.

## Stakeholder Analysis

A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest in your church, group or organisation. They may be insiders or outsiders, influential or relatively powerless, but they have an expectation that you are there in some way for them.

A brainstorm exercise is probably the best way to produce a list of stakeholders of your church. Keep it going long enough to get a really substantial list. In time people will begin to think of some of the less obvious ones (e.g. the Police, who may see the local church as a source of people concerned for law and order in the community; or the people who cut the churchyard grass, who have a concern for visual impact and tidiness...etc.) When you have your list, the next step is to attempt to whittle it down to the five or so 'key stakeholders'. This can be more difficult. Get people to work on it in pairs or small groups first, and then to come together to pool resources and see if they can negotiate a deal! Key stakeholders, of course, are not necessarily the same as the most committed insiders; a church could decide that its key stakeholders included people like baptism families who took the big step of making contact with the church for a special reason and might judge the Christian faith on the basis of how they found that experience.

Next look at the list of stakeholders and ask what each of them expects of the church. Once the exercise gets into its stride you can begin to classify the expectations. For example, different people may look for the following sorts of things from a church:

- Pastoral care- e.g. elderly and housebound
- Teaching or training- e.g. house group leaders
- Spiritual help- e.g. the dying and bereaved