

FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN TALKING AND DOING

Sun 25 May 2014



It was my privilege to have attended the *National Conversation – Revitalising the Church in Our Time* conference with Wayne. There were plenty of presentations to consider and many conversations over coffee to mull over. Conferences are by their nature heavy on ‘talk’. However, the incongruity that such an intensely practical subject as church revitalisation would be framed as a conversation did strike home! It has got me thinking about the balance between talking and doing ... the talk has got me fired up to do four things here in our part of God’s world.

Celebrate the freedoms we have

In talking with people from all over Australia I was reminded that we live, worship, minister and reach out in God’s mission in a flexible context. While many Anglicans are trying imaginative things to reach out to those around them and inspire lively faith in existing congregations, as a diocese we have been given a remarkable degree of freedom to try all sorts of things. Sadly, many of those I met do not enjoy that same freedom.

I know that it is a stressful time in church life and that all of us feel this stress in its various forms. I also know that we still have much to do to help our church structures cope with the demands of this day. However we are travelling on a boat that has turned to run before the wind and can make the changes that are needed.

Keep on being who I am, while finding out how you tick

Being a bush parson at heart, I loved the way the Rev Capt Stuart Haynes spoke with passion about the revitalisation he has seen in two outback Queensland towns. Many of the simple and engaging activities that Stuart used to engage with the community and grow the ability of the established congregations to share their faith were familiar to me and felt comfortable. Stuart and his wife Catherine have used fitness programs, pamper days for women and even a memorial service for miners lost on the job to connect with families in all kinds of different ways.

In many ways, I am like Stuart and his approach is much like mine. I was also stretched by talking with others who are *not* like me, but who are nonetheless reaching people in their communities.

One of the temptations we face when thinking about the church’s future is to latch on to one program, or one way to grow vital faith in those around us. I was reminded that while we serve the one Jesus we do so as people bringing different gifts and enthusiasms in many different contexts. The trick is being confident in who Jesus makes us as this will give us the

flexibility to ask questions, to listen and to learn from others so that we may bear witness to him better.

Before I do something ask – “how will this help my friend to take the next step in faith?”

Every so often I drive home via Constitution Ave to see how the Jamieson House Project is coming along. Each time I am struck by the level of careful planning that has gone into the construction of the rapidly growing building. Each new activity is based upon the foundation laid by the previous one.

I was reminded that coming to and then growing in faith in Jesus is more like building The Jamieson than flicking on a switch; it requires steps based on the previous one. Just as it would be foolish (let alone impossible) to build the patio on the roof of the building before the second floor, so clear, thoughtful pathways from not even knowing who Jesus is to reaching out to others in ministry and mission are needed if we are to serve others well. Too often we expect people to jump from ignorance and disinterest to a seat on parish council without thinking through how it is that they may grow in the faith they need to get there.

We don't yet know what the future structures of the church will look like ... so try something – and keep on asking others what they think

The conference reinforced for me that changing the 'rules' of church is not actually the answer to lasting change. Sure, our rules need to allow life to flourish and be open to change when they do not (but as I wrote earlier, we live in an environment when this can actually happen), but simply changing the rules will not bring life.

We do not yet know what structures the church of the future actually needs to support its task. More importantly, change and liveliness comes from people, not paper! So I was encouraged once more to be brave and simply try something to help others grow in faith in Jesus and keep on asking others, both Christians and not-yet-Christians what they think. And then be prepared to tweak my original plans as they help me gauge how helpful it is.

By The Reverend **Matt Brain**