



A Church fit for the Future

**The Church in the Market Place -
an Oasis of Grace at the Heart of the City**

Stating our Purpose

The purpose of a church is determined by the interaction between what it believes and where it lives, its theology and its culture. For St. Nic's our purpose could be summed up in that phrase to be "an oasis of grace at the heart of the city". Our purpose recognises the primacy of God's grace in dealing with us and the community He has set us in. The image of the "Oasis" captures some of the dynamic of our ministry and situation.

- an Oasis is a place of hospitality. We welcome all sorts of people simply on the basis of offering hospitality. Groups from the community use our facilities and we hope they are "welcomed in the name of the Lord";
- an Oasis is a place of rest. People come aside simply to spend time in quiet reflection or prayer. Our quiet chapel has an astounding number of prayer requests recorded;
- an Oasis is a place of welcome relief. It offers hope and the possibility of journeying on in a harsh and sometimes hostile environment. We deal with many people who find "shelter from the storms of life";
- an Oasis is a place of refreshment and sustenance for the traveller. A number of people share in our life for a while and after a longer or shorter time move on to another location or another church family with resources renewed;
- an Oasis is a concentration of life-giving resources. We seek to share the wide range of people, gifts and resources God has given us with our local region, wider community and world;
- an Oasis is a place where some of us will actually "dwell" (see Abraham at Beersheba with its wells "for a long time" in Genesis 21 v34 & 22 v19). In that case this church becomes the place to settle into real Christian community and will be our focus for growth and service for Christ.

The idea that we are at the heart of the city reflects more than simply our geographical situation. Through the involvement of our members as Christians in the home, school, work, college or other aspects of life we are part of the "heartbeat" of life in a wide area of the city and surrounds.

Spelling out our Key Values

God's Glory

Before anything else we seek to honour God in all of our life together. Central to this is worshipping together. Our services seek to be accessible to a wide range of people and are informal and participatory in style but not casual in our approach to God or each other. They include both contemporary and traditional music and material. We provide teaching groups appropriate to the ages of our younger members and opportunities for "all age" services. We unite in praise, confession, intercession, and ministry of word and sacrament in a liturgical form. We long for our services to display the "human face of God's glory" revealing His presence in our midst.

God's Word

Jesus is at the heart of the church's life. Without Him we can do nothing. We believe that the Bible is God's Word written and through it God speaks and we get to know Jesus. Lively, Christ-centred preaching is motivated by this conviction. The Bible not only informs our mind and moves our hearts but also changes our lives through the grace and gifts of the Spirit. We accept the need to understand both the world of the Bible writers and our present world in order to be first hearers and then doers of the Word as Jesus requires. We continue that learning process through various courses and small group meetings apart from Sunday worship, which are an indispensable means of growth.

God's People

As a church we are not simply a group of individuals but need to develop genuine community. We need such community to sustain our discipleship and to demonstrate God's love at work among us and through us to those around us. We recognise the wide diversity of people who are a part of St. Nicholas. We hope that this diversity is not seen as a problem but rather as a source of richness to our life and fellowship. This diversity demands the ability to welcome people from a wide range of backgrounds and the maturity to recognise other people's points of views on non-essential matters of life and faith. Small groups are an essential part of our life together and are the basis of most of our pastoral care and community life. We have a long-standing pattern of lay involvement in ministry and leadership. We have a growing experience of leadership teams comprising clergy, lay people, paid and voluntary staff and as many others as can be involved working together!

God's World

We are involved in service and evangelism both to our local area and the wider world. We desire to demonstrate God's care through service to others; we also believe that God has entrusted to us the need to call all people everywhere to repentance and faith in Him. Gateway world shop reminds us constantly that our local action affects global issues. It also expresses our desire to reflect God's concern for justice and fairness in all areas of life. At its best, the fact of belonging to the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion keeps both local and global mission before us. We cherish our formal links with mission agencies at work both in Durham and around the world and seek to make these a living involvement with worldwide mission and evangelism.

These key values show themselves in certain dynamics at the heart of our life

We are a church that is Anglican and Evangelical

As an Anglican Church we are committed to service and ministry to our community as well as our membership. We have a full involvement in the life of the Diocese and Deanery of Durham. Our members serve in various aspects of ministry throughout the Diocese. Our financial commitment through our Parish Share supports mission and ministry in other parts of the region and we see this as part of our calling. We are also a liturgical church and we will be adopting the new liturgical material being produced for the year 2000 believing that wisely and flexibly led liturgical worship is a powerful and helpful way of worshipping God in the 21st century. Our experience of shared ministry with clergy and laity in partnership matches the patterns of ministry that the Diocese intends to train and accredit in the near future. Our own life mirrors the concern of the Diocese to be "a Holy People, a Learning People and a Witnessing people" in the North East.

We are a church that is faithful and flexible.

We are unashamed of the historic Christian faith as revealed in the scriptures. The Bible and the gospel shape the form of our expression of church life. We are not ashamed of our distinctive perspective among the various churches in Durham and at times we will bring the view of a "critical friend" as we work with our fellow Anglicans and other churches in the area. However, we are aware that as the situation and culture we inhabit changes we need to be flexible in our expression of our life. We recognise that our structures and ways of doing things will need to change if we are to be effective in commending Jesus to those around us in this and future generations.

We are a church that aims to be obedient and open.

We are committed to organising our life and ministry in obedience to God's call at this present time. The Bible and corporate prayer have a particular place in our life as we try to do this. We need to be obedient to God's voice and open to all that he brings to us, whether people, opportunities, gifts or challenges. We seek to be open to ministry among a wide range of "communities" such as International, children and young people and students and there are other areas such as the civic and commercial life of our city that we hope to be more involved in.

What then shall we do, what are our aims for the next 5 years?

The heart of our vision must be a vision for growth. Growth is the normal pattern of the life of God's Kingdom. Growth needs to be both in quantity and quality!

- **Quantity!** We need to grow in numbers because God desires people to come to faith in Him and become members of His church. Primarily, this growth must be through people coming to a decisive Christian faith when they did not have such faith before. While we rejoice in biological and transfer growth and recognise we have a significant ministry to Christians coming to us from other places or churches we do not see growth through these means as our goal. We are committed to effective evangelism.

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- **Quality!** It is the quality of our life as a church that determines whether or not we grow as God intends. We cannot create growth (only God gives that) but we can create the climate for growth – the quality of our life together. Nothing will replace our changed lives as the central witness to the reality of God in our midst. We are committed to being a healthy church.

As the Vicar of St. Nicholas Church, I am convinced that God is calling us to a “re-ordering” of our outlook, our structures and activities and our facilities. I use the word “re-ordering” because these changes have much in common with the exciting re-ordering of the building that took place when George Carey was Vicar here. Human and organisational changes are inevitably less tangible and harder to see in some ways than a change to a building but they are essential if we are to fulfil our calling to be “the Church in the Market Place.” As such, these changes may well make as great demands of our prayer, time, energy and money as the change in the building did and we will have less *visible* encouragement in the process! But the value to God’s Kingdom and the growing life of the church will be even greater.

Outlook

- Keep before us a Biblical vision of God.
- Sustain our commitment to imaginative, effective teaching and preaching that inspires us to live for Christ.
- Strive for excellence *in God’s sight* in our worship services and our life together.
- Affirm the fact that we must grow as a church and be prepared for change as we grow.
- Accept that we are a medium sized church that is seeking to grow larger. Realise there will be lots of people in a church of this size with multiple congregations we will not know personally. While each one of us is committed to play our part in caring for others we also need accept the fact we can only know a limited circle of people. We have to come to terms with there being people that others know and care for that we do not know and not feel guilty about that fact!
- Continue to accept diversity and be prepared to accept views different to our own on non-essential matters – a church that is “clear at the centre but fuzzy at the edges” gives people time and space to explore faith at their own pace.
- Demonstrate genuine humility and dependence on God in our church life and in our attitude toward other churches.
- Determine to make “every member ministry” a reality. This means every one of us deciding what time and energy we will give to minister to others. This means also a positive commitment to ensure that the vast majority of pastoral care, evangelism, service and all types of ministry really will be done by all of us and not just by the clergy and pastoral staff.

In what way do you believe God is calling you to play your part in this? How is he calling you to change? What help or resources do you need to do this?

Structures and Activities

These two areas belong together because what we do and how we do them are inextricably linked. Structures are important in this! They may not sound exciting, but the issue of how we can enable growth goes back to Moses in Exodus 18 and the early church in Acts 6!

In terms of activities:

- We will use our situation in the Market Place to hold open air evangelistic events (possibly including Sundays with the growing commercial use of Durham centre on Sundays) and put on events inside the building that will be of community interest, show a living church and point to the gospel - the "Flower Festival" gave one large-scale model of what is possible. This could be enhanced by appropriate audio-visual presentations.
- We will relaunch "Alpha" in October 2000 and commit ourselves to a continuous programme of evangelism in addition to our personal witness.
- There will be regular "seeker friendly" services and/or events in the life of St. Nic's that we can have confidence in inviting friends, neighbours or colleagues to.
- Use the new patterns of Liturgy 2000 for our services imaginatively and well so we display a good model of lively, accessible, liturgical worship.
- Develop new patterns of "alternative" worship, probably at times other than a Sunday, as a "mission bridge" of cultural relevance to youth and other sections of our community.
- Involve more of us in "welcoming" as a key activity in the life of this particular church so that we continually look out for the newcomer and speak to people we do not know on Sundays and other times.
- Give a new prominence to the place of prayer in our corporate life. While accepting that prayer goes on in all sorts of ways in the life of St. Nic's there will be a new opportunity for the church to pray "as the church" with a new style monthly gathering for prayer and praise.
- Give practical opportunities for all of us to discover the gifts and ministry God has created us for. Both newcomers and existing membership need to be clear as to both why and how we get involved in ministry as the normal pattern of this church's life.
- Offer short-term courses to encourage Christian learning and growth. Some will deal specific issues while others will have specific groups of people (age, background or professional-related issues related) in mind.
- Develop pulpit exchanges and work with other churches in evangelism and mission to the heart of Durham.
- Play our part in encouraging growth in mission throughout our Deanery and Diocese. Affirm and support the valuable work done by members of St. Nic's throughout Deanery and Diocese.

In terms of structures:

- Our patterns of leadership and ministry will need to be revised so as to sustain growth. At present we cannot meaningfully pastor and develop into maturity more people than there are already linked with us. New structures that enable people to give and receive pastoral care, share in mission and ministry and do not have built

in constraints to further growth will be developed. This may involve more paid staff and/or short term associate workers together with growing volunteer development.

- The essential ministry of housegroups and other small groups will take on even greater significance in pastoral care, fellowship and mission. Dale has agreed arrangements with the Bishop, Wardens and PCC for a sabbatical from January to March 2001. This will give him the opportunity to visit churches that have successfully re-structured for growth as a help to discern the right pattern for our life together. Combined with extensive discussion and prayer by the whole church, this will clarify what the most effective pattern for the next period of the life of St. Nic's will be.
- Develop "Teams for Tasks" so that we have a pool of people with gifts and abilities to enable socials, days and weekends away, catering for Alpha or other events to happen smoothly and flexibly as needed.

Facilities

We enjoy wonderful facilities that we trust further God's Kingdom and not just our own comfort or convenience. We have recently completed substantial work on our heating system and organ. In the future we will need to make a serious commitment to continue a rolling programme of care for the buildings.

- We need to improve disabled access to the building; both access from the street and movement from the lower hall/toilets to the main part of the building.
- New chairs would enhance the use of the building for its variety of purposes. The present ones have seen almost twenty years of use and are wearing out. New chairs can provide better compliance with fire safety regulations for a building like ours.

Also, we seek to develop our buildings so that we can serve God more effectively and plan for growth.

- Our growing work among children and young people challenges us to come up with a solution as to how we provide adequate accommodation for it. We need to determine the future role of the youth centre as a facility for our ministry and work in the community.
- Modern audio-visual equipment would enable us to use a host of visual and audio material in our worship and other meetings. New liturgy and newly written songs can be displayed most helpfully through video projection techniques as could videos from our link missionaries and a host of other material. As our creativity develops so would the use of these facilities in worship, welcoming and mission.

All this assumes we continue the generous and cheerful commitment to support the work here financially and we continue to seek God's guidance as we trust his provision for the future.

In what way do you believe God is calling you to play your part in this? How is he calling us to change? What help or resources do we need to do this?

In Conclusion

We are moving into the Third Millennium. Great changes are taking place around us in our City, Nation and World. As the Vicar of St Nic's, I am convinced that God is calling us to develop a pattern of life that engages with our changing context and can sustain a much larger community of growing Christians. I believe we should seek to become a church in the heart of Durham capable of having a thousand strong meaningful membership. "Meaningful" membership includes: regular attendance at services; sharing our vision of life and ministry; involvement in some form of small group or occasional course; discovering and exercising gifts in ministry; responsible giving to support the ministry and mission of St. Nic's. Such members would be predominantly new Christians and this would confirm we had found appropriate methods of evangelism and of church community life. Only God can give the growth but we need to be "good soil" that makes a fruitful harvest possible.

Some of this "pattern" is outlined in this document. There is an overall vision for our life and many specific targets to aim for. However, much of the new pattern of things still needs to be determined as we go forward together as a church. This is a good opportunity for all of us to be involved in discerning God's will and putting it into action.

I am convinced that under God the purpose, values, dynamics and changes laid out in this document, if adopted by us all, provide the right framework for our growth. Such growth will be based on: Our shared vision of God; Personal spiritual renewal and commitment; Structures that enable rather than limit.

In what way do you believe God is calling you to play your part in this? How is he calling us to change? What help or resources do we need to do this?