

Mission Areas

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

1. The ultimate aim and the Diocesan Mission

The ultimate aim of the Mission Areas initiative can be summarised as: "Under God, an increase in the numbers of people turning to Christ in the Mission Area and taking their place in the life of existing and new congregations."

The natural movement of Christians between churches for a whole variety of reasons results in "transfer growth" (and "transfer decline") of local churches, and it is important to welcome them into our fellowship so that they can continue to grow in their faith and ministry. However, the Diocesan Mission seeks to bring God's word to those who do not currently follow Christ, and to grow God's kingdom so that more people will give him glory and honour. The ultimate aim of conversion growth and new Christians will make a significant contribution, God willing, to the Diocesan Mission –

"To glorify God by proclaiming our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, so that everyone will hear his call to repent, trust and serve Christ in love, and be established in the fellowship of his disciples while they await his return."

2. Building on Connect09, planning and partnership

Connect09 has challenged our churches to look outward and to partner with each other in connecting with the wider community and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. The campaign has helped our churches to focus more attention on their geographical parish area and to pray for the thousands of people who live around us. Door knocking and many other activities have made the community more aware of our churches, and many new contacts have been established. This mindset change from inward to outward, and the renewed effort to seek and save the lost, need to continue and develop into the future. The Mission Area initiative builds on the momentum of Connect09 and all that we have learned from it (see the separate report on Connect09), and is the next stage of Connect09.

The development of Mission Areas gives the opportunity for greater strategic planning at a more local level than the Diocese or the Region, as ministers and churches help each other understand how to more effectively make meaningful connections with people in their community. This planning at the local level will mean that a variety of approaches and strategies will develop reflecting the challenges and opportunities of the particular Mission Area. It will require much prayer, not only for one another but specifically for the community.

The work of the local parish church is still central, but new gospel partnerships, between churches and with diocesan organisations, will mean a new era of co-operation and mutual encouragement that under God will result in more people reached for Christ and all our churches growing. Increasing our gospel partnership will be an exciting learning experience that will take some effort but we trust will honour Christ through more effective evangelism.

3. The broad areas of co-operation

Each Mission Area will develop its own priorities, projects and activities, but broadly speaking, the main areas of co-operation may include the following –

- Researching our community and church. Knowing our community more deeply involves statistical and demographical work that will sometimes surprise us and alert us to new challenges. In addition, there is much to be learned through “in the field” experiential observation. For example, those churches which participated in door knocking and handing out promotional material at railway stations as part of Connect09 gained valuable “relevant” experiences and local knowledge. Understanding our churches is also important. Do our churches reflect the local community? What are our strengths which we can develop further, and what are our weaknesses that require urgent attention? Is our welcome and integration of new people really effective?
- Identifying opportunities. As we look out, we will see many possibilities for new outreach, new congregations and cross cultural and ethnic work. There will be relatively unreached deserts and tribes, and potential connections with businesses, local councils, schools, hospitals and residences. There may be opportunities that we are already aware of and need to keep in mind. Natural contacts which church members already have can be identified and developed. We do not want to be overwhelmed by the possibilities, but challenged and excited by the opportunities that can realistically be taken up.
- Devising strategies and plans. We cannot do everything at once, and so the Mission Area will need to decide on priorities. How will we contact and connect with people? Are there more obvious opportunities to grasp initially with greater result? There may be current outreach ministries that if improved could be far more effective. Eg. Children’s workers, or men’s ministry leaders, in a Mission Area could meet to share best practice and ideas that have worked. Are there new longer term strategies in difficult areas we should develop? What is best left to the parish, what needs co-operation, and what outside help is needed?

- Equipping ourselves. As we make progress in the above, the areas where both clergy and lay people need further training and help will become evident. Much of this will come through mutual learning and experience, through peer mentoring, support, encouragement, evaluation and feedback. We have much to learn from one another. Eg Youth leaders, women's ministry leaders and those who work in seniors' ministry could meet and equip one another. There is sometimes duplication of training in our churches. Different churches could run particular training for the Mission Area thus lessening the training burden on each church. When necessary, we will seek the expertise and experience of those outside our immediate circles. We recognise the great responsibility and pressures on the senior ministers and particularly want to support them in their role of leading the mission in their parishes, through offering peer support, mentoring and workshops.
- Resource sharing. God has given us the resources to do what he has called us to do. We need to see what resources we already have, and be ready to share these with others for the sake of mission and the growth of the kingdom. Resources take many forms – knowledge, experiences, expertise, people, contacts, buildings, music, promotional material and much more.

The above areas of co-operation will work themselves out in different forms depending on local circumstances. There may be a project or event organised for the whole Mission Area, or a smaller cluster of several churches may co-operate in training or an evangelistic event. The task of the Mission Area Leader will be to guide and encourage the co-operative spirit and effort between our ministers and churches.

4. Implementation

The following schedule was presented to synod last year –

1. *By April 2010:* Information gathering from local leadership and demographers about the appropriate shape and boundaries of mission areas.
2. *By June 2010:* Appointment and initial training of mission leaders.
3. *By September 2010:* Consultation with local leadership about the nature and resources and challenges of the local churches.
4. *From January 2011:* Intensives with local leadership about the opportunities of local mission areas and methods of partnership and ministry in them. This would include specialist input where appropriate.

The implementation has proceeded on schedule. Earlier in the year 18 consultations were held in each Mission Area led by Bishop Lee and

the Archbishop, with Andrew Nixon, Russell Powell and the Anglicare Policy Unit. The meetings were well attended. The philosophy and aims of Mission Areas was explained, and the boundaries discussed. Suggestions for the Mission Area Leaders were received.

All Mission Area Leaders have been appointed as follows –

Blacktown-Penrith: David Clarke
Blue Mountains: Ted Brush
Campbelltown-Camden: Deryck Howell
Canterbury-Bankstown: Gary Bennetts
Eastern Suburbs: Warwick de Jersey
Hills and Hawkesbury: Geoff Bates
Inner West: Antony Barraclough
Liverpool: Bruce Dingwall
Lower North Shore: Rick Smith
Parramatta: Raj Gupta
Ryde: Philip Wheeler
Shoalhaven-Southern Highlands: Matthew Pickering and
Richard Mills
St George: Matthew Yeo
Sutherland: Neil Fitzpatrick
Sydney Inner City: Justin Moffatt
Upper North Shore: Bruce Stanley
Warringah: Kerry Nagel
Wollongong: Stephen Semenchuk

We thank these men for accepting the invitation to lead us in this new structure for mission for our diocese. Their appointment is for an initial three years, and they will work closely with Bishop Lee in the implementation of this initiative. Several training days have been completed with the leaders, and the generous services of a number of clergy and professional lay people has been much appreciated. At the time of writing of this report, most Mission Area Leaders have met personally with over half of the senior ministers in their area. Local mission area meetings are being organised with a few already held.

The feedback from ministers and lay people have generally been very positive about the potential encouragement and co-operation that Mission Areas and gospel partnerships may deliver. All our diocesan organisations have expressed their support and hand of partnership. The effectiveness for mission will depend on our efforts together, and on God's blessing and help, but early indications point to a great willingness to achieve more together than each on our own. Some are adopting a more "wait and see" approach and this is understandable.

Below is a sample of early reports from various Mission Area Leaders concerning their conversations with ministers and joint projects and plans.

- 7 Parishes have recently engaged in combined ministry training. 21 Courses were offered ranging from a one day course through to 7 nights. Over 200 people took part.
- Meeting with the Rectors has been a real positive ... hearing how many of them are already working together at mission and are keen to think about how to do more.
- Having the scope of mission areas limited just to mission is a real bonus – keeps it tight and achievable.
- The rectors I have met with are all working hard, keen to be missional and to grow, and willing to investigate new ideas.
- We can better co-operate in supporting regional outreach events (eg. evangelistic events for men) and can further co-operate in High School Scripture work, as schools draw people from a number of parishes.
- Rectors I have met with have been enthusiastic about the possibilities of starting new, co-operative ventures in our Region. They also see the value of meeting to better support each other personally.
- I've been personally encouraged that many think Mission Areas is an idea whose time has come, and will build very helpfully on what is already happening.
- People are looking forward to working together to reach some of the tribes and deserts in our area e.g. public housing people.
- Our mission area lacks evening church gatherings, and so we are exploring the possibility of churches getting together and starting a combined one, and also thinking about combined weekly youth groups in order to gain a critical mass.
- A number of our churches have combined to form a kind of school for lay training, offering training at each of our local locations.
- There are parts of our Mission Area with churches in very close proximity, and parts with whole suburbs untouched by a church presence, and so we are looking at how this can be addressed.
- We are working on how lay people can get together and sharpen each other in ministry skills and share ideas and resources for our women's, men's, youth and children ministries.
- We will commit to praying for one another and having regular public prayer in each of our churches for the Mission Area.
- We have just run a combined youth event in our mission area and had over 300 people from ten Anglican churches - youth

sitting in aisles because we ran out of chairs, and praying that they would not be ashamed of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

5. Conclusion

The challenge of working together to reach our diocese for Christ is a real one as we have generally worked as separate individual parish churches, and although we believe in the same gospel and the same Lord, there will always be a variety of approach and philosophies of ministries, as there should be. It will take time to develop a new culture of co-operation, but the early signs seem to indicate a real desire to achieve more together than as individual churches and to help one another.

There is much other good gospel work in the diocese that continues and must continue, and the Mission Areas initiative is a part of the mission God has laid on our hearts. The spiritual health and commitment to bible based ministry of all our churches and organisations is uppermost. Far more important than any "strategy" is the labour of humble prayer that must accompany our efforts for the Lord and the evangelisation of our diocese.

The Christ who said "I will build my church" also said "Without me you can do nothing".

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

BISHOP IVAN LEE

16 September 2010