

Good News for Growth

Proposal for a new centre to revitalise the Church's mission

Introduction

The Church can grow because the world needs the good news of Jesus Christ.

However, in reality, Church of England attendance continues to decline. Less than half the 2021 census respondents described themselves as "Christian". The Church, therefore, needs to reconsider its mission and evangelism. This paper proposes a radical new way forward – literally "radical" in terms of returning to its roots – so that it can rediscover its confidence in the relevance of the good news.

Problem and Solution

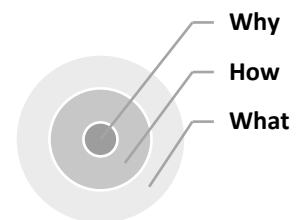
The Gospels describe the ministry of Jesus as "good news" (e.g., Matt 9.35). All who met Jesus found good news. This gospel came in many forms, including healing (e.g., Luke 6.18), forgiveness (e.g., Mark 2.5), physical nourishment (e.g., Matt 14,21), deliverance from death (John 8.11) and the promise of a place in paradise (Luke 23.43).

On the other hand, there is much about today's Church which does not seem like good news: historic wrongs, contemporary divisions and a perceived lack of relevance. It is fair to ask: Why is Jesus Christ good news for climate change, the war in Ukraine, racial injustice, artificial intelligence, disinformation, personal identity – or any of the issues that face people in their everyday lives such as rising prices? It is not always clear. At the same time, twenty-first century concerns go largely unaddressed by the Church's preaching on the forgiveness of sins, eternal life or Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Even the message that "God loves you" can lose its potency, becoming little more than an empty slogan.

What is needed is a renewed focus on the good news of Jesus Christ as we seek to proclaim the Gospel afresh in our generation. At the same time, we must relate Christian faith to the issues, concerns and peoples of our age. The task requires theology, communication and practical action. First, we need boldly imaginative theology to re-present our beliefs using contemporary ideas, images and metaphors. We then need ways to communicate the good news so that it cogently addresses the real issues. Practically, we need to live out this good news in our actions and priorities. This is no small task.

Connection with Other Initiatives

In his book, *Start with Why* (Penguin, 2009), Simon Sinek sets out his golden circle model of strategy. This is based on *what*, *how* and *why*. All organisations know *what* they do. Some understand their unique selling point: the *how*. However, only a few organisations – the most successful – begin with the *why*. Why do they exist at all?



Thanks to the lead of the Archbishop of York, the Church of England is already thinking about its vision and strategy. The General Synod paper GS 2223 describes a Church that is simpler, humbler and bolder – a Church for the whole nation which is Christ centred and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission. This will be a Church that is made up of missionary disciples, where mixed ecology is the norm, and which is becoming younger and more diverse.

In Simon Sinek's model, this vision and strategy are the *how*. They answer the question: What kind of Church should we want? Strategically though, we need to step back further and begin with the *why*. Why does the Church exist at all? What is its purpose? Answering this question brings us back to the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus is our *why*.

Outline Proposal

In the light of these thoughts, I propose that the Church of England sets up a centre for reimagining the good news for today. This would need to be suitably funded, resourced and staffed.

Aims and Outcomes

The aims of the centre would be:

1. To consider afresh the theology of good news – the *why* of the Church.
2. To relate the good news of Jesus Christ to contemporary issues.
3. To provide resources to equip those involved in preaching, teaching, mission and ministry.
4. To create engaging evangelistic material to communicate the good news to the unchurched.
5. To enable parishes and dioceses to align their priorities with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Approach

The work of the centre would be based around five core activities:

1. Convene groups of theologians and church leaders to think – in a context of prayer and worship – about how the good news of Jesus might be expressed today. These would need to be safe, confidential spaces to allow for genuinely creative and imaginative thinking, unconstrained by unexamined adherence to traditional dogma.
2. Identify key issues which are not apparently addressed by the good news of Jesus. For each issue, bring together a cross-disciplinary symposium, including specialists in that area, to consider the contribution which the Christian gospel might make to that issue.
3. Write up the conclusions of these discussions in two distinctive ways, with different audiences in mind: (a) as inward-facing teaching resources to be used, for example, in parishes, dioceses and theological training institutions, and (b) as outward-facing resources to commend the Christian faith as good news to those outside the Church.
4. Propagate the work of the centre through engagements across the Church and in wider society.
5. Work with practitioners to recommend ways for turning the ideas of the centre into action.

Timescale and Staffing

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | |
|------------|---|--------|--------|--------|--|
| Activities | Initial planning and secure funding | | | | |
| | Set up the centre and staffing | | | | |
| | Public launch | | | | |
| | Convened theological meetings | | | | |
| | Cross-disciplinary symposiums | | | | |
| | Produce inward-facing teaching material | | | | |
| | Produce outward-facing material | | | | |
| | Propagate the work through speaking | | | | |
| | Plan action and projects with practitioners | | | | |
| | Publicity | | | | |
| Staff | Director | | | | |
| | Administrator | | | | |
| | Editor and communications lead | | | | |

Conclusions

Demonstrating how the good news of Jesus meets the needs of the world is vital for growing the Church. It answers the Church's *why*. This project could be a small step towards making that a reality.