

**SEVEN MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**  
**FINDING OUT WHAT GOD WANTS**  
**ST MARY'S CHURCH**  
**11.12.11**  
**9.30 SERVICE**

I am sure that many of you know that over the next few weeks Richard, Ngozi, Michael and I are focussing our sermons on the process of Mission Action Planning – MAP for short.

For those of you who may have missed the first three addresses and also to refresh the memories of those who were here I will very briefly recap on what was said.

Richard in the first address explained the background of MAP in that it came from a survey drawn up after several churches were visited and information gathered in an attempt to explain why some churches were flourishing more than others.

From the results of this survey a list of reasons were put forward which became known as the Seven Marks of a Healthy Church and it's these seven marks which are forming the basis of our addresses over the next few weeks.

Ngozi covered the first mark Energized by Faith when she described how worship and sacramental life should move people to experience God's love.

That we should be motivated for a desire to serve God and one another by engaging with Scripture and helping others to grow in their faith by witnessing to them what God has done for us personally.

Then last week Richard talked about the second mark of a healthy church which concentrates on having an outward looking focus.

He spoke about how as a church we should constantly be aware of not only the needs of people within the church but should be constantly be looking out for ways in which we can show compassion to those living around us in the parish and beyond.

Because the survey showed that the flourishing churches were those who were very much aware of what was going on in their communities and taking an active part in any way they could.

This morning I would like us to look at the third mark of a healthy church which seeks to find out what God wants.

Personally I think that this is the basis of all the other marks because if we are not seeking to find out what God wants for St Mary's and to be brave enough to obey him, we will never be a healthy church.

We may come up with all sorts of ideas but if they are not sanctioned by God we're on to a loser!

When we genuinely seek to find out what God wants for his church here at St Mary's - and remember it is God's church, not ours we will then have to face the cost of change and growth.

So how do we find out what God wants for us personally as members of St Mary's and also what does he wants for us corporately?

Well we're never ever going to know what God wants unless we are willing to spend time individually and corporately listening to God and to each other.

The healthy flourishing churches are those who put great importance on prayer. Everything they plan is first prayed about over an extended period of time.

They don't rush into things and then ask God to bless their efforts.

They need first of all to consider that what they are hoping to plan is what God will approve of and they can only know that if they spend time with God.

Churches which are flourishing are churches which have had a vision. This vision may well start with the leaders, but quoting Robert Warren "It does not become real until owned by most of the church.

And the best way to achieve that ownership is to allow and encourage people to design it.

They will then be more motivated to work to bring it into being."

But having a vision is not enough.

It must be shared with others and then there must be a willingness to corporately spend time in prayer laying this vision before God and asking for guidance.

There must be time set aside when people can gather together and pray.

In the early church this was never a problem.

The very basis of their Christian faith was to gather together in prayer.

It wasn't an optional extra - it was woven into their very life style.

Again quoting Robert Warren "It was a brave and dangerous thing to become a follower of Christ in the Early Church as it still is across large parts of the world today. Ostracism, rejection by family and friends, loss of livelihood and even life, have all been the price that some of our fellow Christians have experienced.

What we must ask ourselves is how much do we really want to know what God's will is for us here in St Mary's.

Do any of us here have a vision of what St Mary's could become or are we so comfortable doing things the way they've always been done before that we are unconcerned that there are hundreds of people in our parish who do not know about the love of Jesus and who are living with fear anxiety and rejection to name but a few of their problems.

Here in St Mary's we have a Prayer Fellowship involving 30 people who pray daily for each other and the needs of both those in the congregation and the parish.

At the present moment our prayers are focussed on the Mission Action Planning incorporating the seven marks of a healthy church.

Now in a congregation of our size 30 people aren't very many. Wouldn't it be great if we could double that number?

On Sunday evenings at 5 o' clock there are a handful of us gathering together for an hour to pray for our people here and in the parish.

We are lucky if we get 5 or 6!

Now I'm sure that many of you do pray at home for various situations but to join together in corporate prayer is a very different matter and it produces results.

So I will leave you with some thoughts.

Remember this is God's church and he longs for us to work with him in witnessing to those around us in such a way which gives honour to his name.

Do you really want St Mary's to grow in the power of the Holy Spirit and are you prepared to take time to ask God to show you the part you must play in the building up of his church here in Goldington?  
Do you have a vision as to how St Mary's could become a more vibrant and outgoing church than it is now and are you prepared to share that vision with others?

This is something we must all be involved in even though it means us sometimes moving outside our comfort zone.

I would really like you to go home and think carefully and prayerfully as to how you see St Mary's functioning in the future.

Write down any thoughts or pictures that come to you and bring them to church where a box will be available to put your papers in.

Then hopefully we can bring these ideas in prayer to God and ask for his guidance.

And it won't mean that this will only involve just the leaders praying but as many of you as possible coming together in prayer over a period of time.

God needs to know we mean business and have a real desire to pray to and worship him in such a way that others can see how much we value spending time with him.

Let us pray

Lord God, in Christ you make all things new. Grant to your Church a new vision of your glory, a new experience of your power, a new consecration to your service, that through the witness of a renewed and dedicated people your work may be revived and your kingdom extended among us for the honour of your name. Amen