

Preparing the soil for new growth

Keeping alongside churches as they design and implement growth plans is a team of facilitators. Here two of them offer a glimpse of the experience from the Facilitator's viewpoint. .

You are given the name of a congregation – and they have been given your name as their facilitator. Now to start on a journey of companionship!

It's a privilege to be invited to someone's home, and to someone's congregation.

As with individuals and families, so with congregations: they are amazingly diverse. I have worked in urban Glasgow and rural Galloway, travelling for minutes or hours to reach my companion congregation; it's always exciting – sometimes stressful, but always rewarding.

Set in differing contexts, with different traditions and management styles, each faith community displays particular riches, particular gifts, talents and hopes. The journey undertaken by the facilitator involves a gradual discovery of these riches.

In our own congregation we are often caught up in the concerns of the moment, fixing the leaking tap, preparing next Sunday's readings, coping with the latest crisis.

But when a newcomer visits and asks to hear stories from our life together, as the anecdotes are shared, that stranger acts as a kind of mirror enabling us to understand the history, to see the shape, and the potential of our congregation –as if for the first time. Facilitators are reflectors, encouraging reflection.

Reflecting on past and present gifts – and gaps – congregations and clergy can work together to discern God's call to them at this time and in their particular context.

Then, with lots of prayer; and gifts of the Spirit such as common sense and pragmatism, goals can be set, and the way forward planned with the help of the Diocesan Development Groups and the companionship of the facilitator. *Gill Young*

One of the most striking things I have discovered in being involved with the Mission and Growth strategy, as facilitator and clergy member, is the awareness of a growing unity of purpose and direction that is resulting across the charges.

As was said at a recent meeting: "This is no longer just a strategy... it is a change in DNA."

I sense this among the congregation with which I have been working, as well as with my own people.

One of the reasons for this inward change is that the process demands an ownership, a collective lifting of heart and head to look outward, to look beyond ourselves with hope and vision, and to work collaboratively as a community of faith on a common path. Taking this knowledge on board, I would encourage charges that are yet to start the process to take the time to introduce the strands and ethos of the Strategy gradually and thoroughly to their people.... to let it be absorbed... to let it get beneath the skin.

In the two charges with which I have been involved, before even engaging a facilitator, we ran a series of six sermons, taking each strand separately, exploring it scripturally and asking for written congregational responses to what was being said.

We also made a display at the back of church with the same questions that were raised in the sermons, and backed this up with magazine articles and flyers.

The Strategy prayer was said at every service and included in the intercessions. By the time a facilitator was brought in, the congregation felt informed, included and part of the process. This, I firmly believe, is a vital component to the whole process and distinguishes it from previous initiatives. May we all soon see, through this common purpose, the fruit of God's grace and our labour. *Revd Liz O'Ryan*