

**“A community following Jesus” - Luke 9:51 – 10.9 - a sermon preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church, Dunedin on 12 October 2014 - immediately prior to the Annual Meeting.**

Two weeks ago our Church Council, having consulted the congregation, adopted a Strategic Plan for Knox for the next three years. There is a mission statement - a community following Jesus, joining God’s Spirit active in the world. There is a vision statement – a growing movement of people with courage to live the way of Jesus. And there are six strategic outcomes to do with:

1. caring for each other;
2. becoming more cross-cultural;
3. worshipping in a variety of styles;
4. supporting the most vulnerable in our community;
5. engaging with students;
6. speaking out.

And today, after worship, we have our Annual Meeting. So I am going to imagine what stories we will tell at the time of our annual meeting in three years’ time. To be clear, these are hypotheticals. Yet I have experienced these in different congregations across Australia and New Zealand, and they happen, and if we want them, they will happen here. So let’s go, and as I talk I invite you to imagine the stories you will tell of Knox in three years’ time.

**It’s October 2017 - it’s our Annual Meeting. This is what we talk about.**

- People who are in any way linked with Knox Church – they were baptised here, they were married here, the funeral of their mother or father, their grandmother or grandfather was held here, or their son or daughter was in the choir for a while, or their children were baptised here, or they attended a concert here and had an experience of peace, or beauty or warmth or otherness, something happened here to them and they put a note in a leaflet and left it in our pews, or they used to attend Knox for a while, twenty years ago – all these people, hundreds of people, feel they are Knox, whether they attend or not, they feel they are Knox, and Knox is not other than them, every single one of them, Knox is not Knox without them – and they are drawn to caring for others, to be part of a community where people love each other, pray for each other, are there for each other – so they will engage with some aspect of the community, and they will know there are people, specific people, two or three people who tangibly, warmly, thoughtfully communicate God’s love to them, in word and in action, and they are given opportunity to do the same for others. They will hear about how people who face challenges are supported, people who are ill are cared for, people who are facing death are prayed with and journeyed with, people who are struggling in their marriage or relationships have a confidant, people who experience a highlight or a success or an achievement know there are others celebrating with them, children know they are known, their names are known, their challenges are known, their success is celebrated, and everyone is visited quarter after quarter, consistently, attentively, compassionately – that is what we are going to report in three years’ time. Do you want to be part of this?

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- We have a place, perhaps a new building, perhaps an old building refurbished, a venue somewhere, where Knox people and professionals collaborate and work together, where people re-entering the community from prison are able to practise new skills, to become more employable, more literate, more connected, where they learn to trust and be trusted – or where people needing support find respite or where some gap in community services draws Knox into the heart of the city, the messy, tough, risky, raw, desperate, vulnerable, dangerous, difficult heart of the city – where people hurt and struggle and fail and succeed and wonder whether it is worth trying again – and where we feel that sometimes, sometimes, the only thing we can do is pray because it seems so overwhelming;
- We have a place, where students and young professionals committed to embodying a community of love, of justice, of care for creation, share accommodation, pray together, read the Bible together, learn theology that matters, and have a sense of what is going on in the community around us, in the bars across the road, in the student flats in Pitt Street, so as well as achieving academically, they learn discipleship, they develop the skills of caring for others, sacrificially, warmly, compassionately, and they keep opening the eyes of others here at Knox to what happens at night, who is beside us, who we are beside, and we and they are never the same again. And every month a retired teacher or professor or lawyer or whatever, meets with a group of young people who want to know what it means to follow Jesus – how do you do it in your work? Do you want to be part of this?

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- A child comes home from Church and asks her mother – where is Zimbabwe mum. Why do you ask? Well today, you know, when we had our monthly shared Sunday School with Forward in Faith (the Pentecostal African congregation that worships in our Hall), David, my friend, said that his family came from Zimbabwe, and he told me a bit about what it was like, and I am really sad for his family, and can you help me find Zimbabwe on the map, mum? Who was Robert Mugabe?
- And a person visiting Knox comes out of our quarterly combined evening service, saying something like: “Well, African Pentecostalism, Korean Presbyterianism, Indonesian music, Philippines justice, Knox Choir, Pacifica, and Anglo-celtic spirituality, all together. Whoever would have thought this was Knox Church Dunedin! It was messy, it was different, it didn't all go perfectly, I didn't like all of it, but don't you have a sense that this is how the world needs to be, so we learn how to be human beside each other, not disconnected – honouring God together? And as we practise and persevere, then eventually we will get better at it?”

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- A Rotary member comes up to you and says – “Who do you people at Knox think you are! I saw that article in the newspaper by that Knox member, I have forgotten her name, saying let's stand alongside people of Islamic faith at this time. You people are in cloud-cuckoo land – Islam is taking over the world. Those Muslims are brutalising innocent people, they are oppressing women, they are keeping children from education, they are doing terrible harm.” And the Knox person responds “Well, we are trying to follow Jesus, and he did not condemn people of other faiths and I don't think we should either. And have you seen how

Muslim leaders are condemning those who dishonour Islam. And Christianity has not had a blameless past.”

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- Three children are baptised at the Alive at 5 gathering, started just a year ago – an occasion for families, with food, basic liturgy, images of faith, earthy spirituality, messy and participatory, and our music band, our instrumentalists lead us in some music by Malcolm Gordon;
- Then there is the Church camp, the silent retreat, the deepening prayer, the regular reading of the Bible, the diversifying and outreach in all kinds of ways.

**A community following Jesus –**

- A Jesus who although a Jew, does not condemn Samaritans, even though his disciples asked him to – a hint at relating with other faiths;
- A Jesus who brings the kingdom near, a Jesus not consigned to the past, but coming from the future, calling to us “Come into the kingdom, enter the realm I promise humankind, follow me there.”;
- A Jesus who goes where people are, not asking them to come to be where he is, who accepts their hospitality, and attends to them, where they are and who says “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”

**A community following Jesus.**

### **Prayer of Praise and Confession**

Driving north, we come over the brow of the hill, looking down on Waitati, and spread before us is a vista, sun glistening on sea, sea smoothing into cloud, cupped in green hills with tidy hedges and stone walls – what can we say? We praise your beauty beyond our capacity to take it in.

We sit at the bed of a person on the final journey of life, nearing death, a remarkable person whose life touched people with goodness, a person who knows our prayers and Bible and faith, and we pray as they search for breath – what can we say? We praise your love beyond our capacity to exhaust it.

We watch people walking along George Street, talking, laughing, pausing at a window, grabbing a kiss, taking a hand, waiting at the lights – what can we say? We praise your life beyond our capacity to package it.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, wondrous God, we praise you.

As we enter this place, arouse in us a deep sense of the beauty of life, the infinity of love, the marvel of humanity.

For a moment, focus our wonder on you, that our senses may be awakened to your life, in every person, in every place, in every moment.

Forgive us for making the gathered church too important, exaggerating the significance of our time together. Forgive us for making it less than it is, neglecting our practising of life together, of listening to each other, of celebrating your love.

Come to us, we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Assembly**

- The news has focused on the subject of equal marriage, but this was perhaps the most hopeful Assembly I have seen in 30 years, because for the first time we saw the moderate middle be very outspoken about living with diversity – and it was evident in our Moderator, Andrew Norton, and in the Moderator Designate Richard Dawson and in many people who take the name evangelical. So yes, there was a decision, but there are aspects of the decision which are more than was reported in the paper;
- Assemblies are very different than the first one I came to as commissioner here in 1985, more like the UCA – sat around tables, informality, engagement, conversation;
- Inspiration – we celebrated many achievements, people like Doreen Riddell who served many years in India, people like Malcolm Gordon who is recognised as one of the best church musicians in Australia and New Zealand, and many others;
- We heard from Glenn Colquhoun a great Northland poet and doctor whose faith questions are ours, and we heard a Taiwanese choir and a Samoan choir of outstanding ability;
- We decided to divest from fossil fuels.
- Look at the Moderator's blog.

