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**Parish of St Matthews Masterton**

**Mission Action Plan 2021**

**The Way Ahead**

***“What does Jesus as the living head of our church want us to be and do in the next 5 years?”***

**Our Shared Future Story**

Our Mission Action Plan journey came at a critical time in parish life against the global backdrop of a pandemic. Across the discovery groups that met, there was strong representation from across the Parish which includes: St Matthews Masterton, St Andrews Upper Plain, St Frances Bideford and St Albans Taueru. Collectively there was recognition that we, the community of faith, need to move forward with a shared vision for the future. The feedback contained here includes the voices of all who took part in the Mission Action Plan discovery groups and questionnaire. It summarizes the feedback and ideas that were shared.

What we found was that much of what was talked about was similar and so we can draw out the themes of the discussions. It was agreed that we should spend some time reflecting on our vision (why we exist) and mission (why we do what we do) across three areas; our worship, community life and outreach. There are great ideas for how to achieve this and what needs to change to help us get where we want to go.

We are caretakers and communicators of the love of Jesus in our local and global community. We look honestly and humbly towards what God might be asking of us. We look for a pathway that brings unity, sustainability and clarity to help us move forward together.

**Vision - What we desire to see in the future**

*“We are family, we are disciples, we prioritise the last, lost and least.”* This Diocese vision statement becomes our new vision statement that we adopt for St Matthews going forward. *Family* is being community together, the body of Christ, young and old side by side, forging the way ahead together over meals, in laughter and in tears. *Disciples* is about how we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, how we learn and grow in the faith in worship, in prayer, by ourselves and with each other. *Last, least, lost* - is our mandate to be *good news* to our community and our world. What follows are priorities for each of these three areas.

**Family**

* *Children & Youth and Intergenerational Community* - Passing on the baton of faith is going to be vital in the next few years. The 10am service in particular can have flexibility to try creative ways of being church, to foster relationship building. Having a revitalised social space where we can gather and share stories have bible studies, messy church, worship jamming sessions and community meals together. Our parish is there for all families. Families that have faith or know about faith but haven’t been a part of it and even those that don’t know faith yet. We could have a child minding service for our neighbours in the police station, maybe even our local schools. We are hospitable to our community having our Whanau Fun Nights once a month but expanding on that we could start having Whanau BBQ’s on weekends as well after church using the new fire pit in the community garden. Gathering all our community for a shared meal to come and gather, talk, sing, laugh and share to be with one another in no specific setting other than just be together.
* *Welcoming* - How people are welcomed, feel included and intentionally discipled into our church family is important and there is no current, clear on-ramp for newcomers. We will develop a clear welcome plan
* *Pastoral Care -* Develop a team who oversee pastoral care and rest home services
* *Social Life* – We have had a few great events recently like the Christmas Party and Women of Faith meetings – we suggest a regular monthly rhythm of church lunches or dinners.
* *Men’s ministry* – Discern and start an informal men’s group based around food / fellowship
* *Wider church* - Increase links with Epiphany via 5th Sunday worship and Trinity schools via aligning the new school chaplain of St Matthews with the parish here.

**Disciples**

* *Prayer Rhythms* – Expand morning prayer to include more people / equip those who can't make it for daily faith. Align this with the Bishops charge to deepen daily corporate prayer in parishes.
* *Small Groups / Discipleship* - There is a need to offer more groups at various times giving everyone an opportunity to join a small group and have alignment with all the groups and content that is being studied.
* *Retreat space established at Upper Plain* (more on this later)

**Good News**

* *Alpha* – Aim to run an Alpha course once a year as a key focus on evangelism.
* *Missional Communities Outside Sundays* - Explore new ways of worship outside the Sunday service model in the local community
* *Shared Goals and Outreach* – The Wheelers / Project Maanaki / The Police – some work is needed on how we have shared mission work locally that all are involved in and support
* *Anglican Schools Links* - Working on the (re)alignment especially with St Matthews School and Church working together with worship and service opportunities. There is potential for the new St Matthews Chaplain and R.E Teacher to be separate roles and for those people to be part of our parish Leadership Team here, living in community with the vicarage family, whilst living out their ministry with the school. The recent review of the school suggested we re-capture the history of church and school being on the same track.
* *Social Housing* – Use our land to build housing units in accordance with the synod goal of seeing how churches can be a solution to the housing crisis.
* *Care of Creation* – Explore being an “eco-friendly” church as a form of discipleship. As part of this goal is the much needed re-vamp of the church community gardens and how they can best be used long term to serve the community, this maybe an area where we can partner with Anglican schools.
* *Bi-cultural Journey* - Going beyond using the odd prayer in church, there is a need to explore relationships with local iwi and Maori Tikanga; given that 50% of our local high school are Maori, we do not look like our local community at all. How might we show generous hospitality to include more Te Reo values in what we do and who we are as part of a three tikanga church?

**Our Buildings**

The buildings and assets we have are vehicles to get us to our mission; they are not the mission itself. What we need and can afford today, moving forward, will be different from a hundred years ago when most were put in place. Some criteria to assess the future possibilities of buildings and congregations within the diocese have recently been questions like:

* Is it a community hub – is there social life there?
* Is it used for missional/communal activity – is it a living place or merely a Sunday worship space?

Centralising our parish life around the St Mattews site has been on the cards for a number of years and the below changes will help this become a reality…

**St Matthews Site**

As revealed at the AGM, the church redevelopment can add a better entrance, toilets, hospitality space, play space and multi use worship space. We must hold the traditional space (the chapel) alongside the new expression of church that will emerge. The drawings reflect this with flexible seating instead of pews in the main body of the church only, the chapel space remains as is.

Our desire is to bring life to the site, considering we have 3 large buildings, we are only here an hour a week and this now needs to change as we seek to grow intentional community based around prayer, hospitality and service.

The CAF hall will be moved off site to make way for housing.

In addition to this, the main church hall will have a feasibility study done as to whether it could be transformed into apartments, that form part of the new social housing on site, or an updated commercial lease. All apartments and housing long term would bring a rental income, of which 60% goes to the parish once they are freehold and 40% to the Diocese who will manage and implement this project. It was widely felt that if the changes go ahead for the church, we have no logical use for the hall as the front of the church and modified worship space become the community space. We can't upgrade both spaces for the same reason. Doing nothing is not a wise decision, as the hall continues to experience wear and tear.

Part of the housing scenario will be to form an intentional community to house either an Anglican Youth Ministry house, or similar set up to live alongside the vicarage. Additional units would be rented out. The ultimate goal is to build community on site around the church and gardens.

**St Andrews Upper Plain**

The location and modern hall provide a beautiful retreat space and feel. In an age of busyness, there is a great opportunity to have a hall and chapel space that invite a slower pace of life based on prayer and hospitality. The Waingawa river nearby was named as it was: “*uncertain or troubled because the river appeared to go in all directions with many bends. It did not look like it knew where it was going.”* Using the geography of place; we can provide a place of spiritual direction and guidance for the wider church locally and further afield.

There is also an opportunity with the space behind the hall to add a small house for someone to run this. In time, we may discern to replant this church, once we have a team in place or at the other end of the decision making spectrum, we could sell the site and cover the cost of the St Matthews changes. These are not easy decisions and should not be rushed. To enable a new future to emerge, we will leave the church fallow for a year; we will continue Sunday worship up to the St Andrews centennial in November 2022 and then celebrate all that has been and then step back to see what will be.

From that point onwards we will not provide regular Sunday worship there. There will be a few options for the current 10am congregation, that could meet in someone's home or in the hall mid-week as a small group and/or join the existing 8am or 10am services. We can no longer sustain the 10am service twice a month while we have a service at the same time 5 minutes drive away. Historically there was a good reason for this, but moving forward we cannot foster parish unity and divide ourselves and our limited resources. This is hard to acknowledge, yet is the best path forward.

After the centennial celebrations, with no regular worship we would still encourage the hall to be used more by the wider church and local community.

**St Francis, Bideford**

We have not led services here since the level 4 lockdown of 2020 and so we are proactively seeking to gift the church to the local landowners as most of the maintenance has always been done by the locals. This step honors that heritage and makes formal what in many ways already exists informally.

**St Albans,Tauweru**

This will stay as it is. Funding has been obtained to paint the outside – there is a good once a month community that meets there . We will also explore the use of the land behind the church as we move forward.

**Church of the Good Shepherd, Tinui**

This church is currently being refurbished and once building work is complete the church will be open. It then becomes a festival church and is used for special services; when this happens our parish will then officially merge with the parish of Tinui. As part of this process Tinui will also look at the future of the Whareama building. Along with Rev Steve Thomson, Vicar Pete will explore new models of rural house churches and missional opportunities to rural schools, as well as how to reach the Riversdale and Castlepoint communities.

**It's 5-10 years from now and parish life is thriving, how did we get there?**

As our future selves look back in gratitude, we will have seen the church of the covid age, asked 3 basic questions:

1. What is?
2. What could be?
3. What will be?

The above changes resulting from our discussion groups looked at questions 1 and 2, and most churches get stuck there. What could be, is often seen as too hard or too costly or we don’t do it as it might create division and disagreement, yet we need to do these things to begin to see the answer to question three and the emerging future.

We can therefore imagine housing on site, with some people living there linked to the church and our shared work; the gardens and new firepit are a communal space where people meet. St Matthews church has been redeveloped and the flexible space has created more community opportunities, with a sense of a worshiping church more based around relationships and meals. The new community and foyer space is being used for Alpha courses, budgeting and parenting groups. The church has become a village without walls. All of the above changes could simply be moving around the furniture, so it's essential to understand these steps forward must be an outworking of our vision. Also these decisions are based on being realistic of what we can afford to keep and maintain and to ask what sort of legacy we are leaving for the future church in the area. These steps will foster both unity and sustainability. For some there will be grief and loss. This is not to be minimised; someone has commented on this, saying, *“Christian denominations everywhere are struggling to practically manage and pastorally and liturgically respond to church closure, deconsecrating, and reuse...The study of church closure raises a number of theoretical and theological ideas and issues focused not so much on matters of doctrine and belief as with questions of place and memory, respect and shame, success and failure. The reactions to and handling of church closure is a window on to the nature and meaning of “place” to practicing, contemporary Christians...Baptisms, weddings, funerals—moments of passage in the course of a life—make the building not merely a container but a place, textured with emotions, stories, images, and feelings.”* So these recommendations are not made lightly, yet with a sense that they do need to be made and now is the time to move on all fronts. We cannot just make some minor tweaks or adjustments and expect everything to be fine and stay in cruise mode; we are all aware that a new adventure and shared journey is shaping up and we are all invited into this way ahead.

**Timeline and Next Steps**

Some decisions will require a parish Special General Meeting, and as a church family we will need to formally agree too:

* The removal of the old CAF hall to make space for housing.
* The (re)development of the church frontage.
* The building of housing on site.
* Future use and function of the main hall as apartments or commercial space.
* Deconsecration and gifting of St Francis Bideford to the local community.

**Then what?**

These decisions will then need approval from the Diocese Council and Board of Trustees to ensure due process and that what we are proposing lines up missionally with the Diocese aims and objectives and that the financial risk is acceptable.

**2022 and Beyond**

All of the above will be in progress; updates will be given to the whole parish as we go. There will be hurdles and setbacks to overcome, yet after hearing all our voices, coupled with the reality of where we currently are, these next steps will be taken in faith, hope and love.

For many of us who are retired, this may well be the last Jesus adventure that you can contribute towards, both financially, in prayer and time wise to leave a legacy for the next generation. If we can do this journey well, then we will have lived out one of the greatest commands in scripture, *“ One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.**They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty.”* Psalm 145: 4-5.