

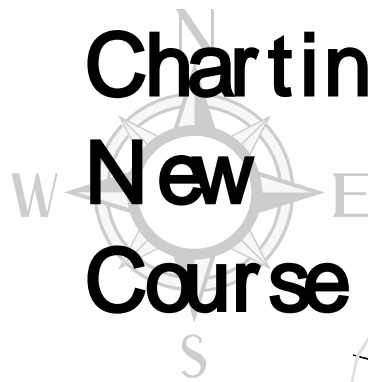


Consultancy Report

Dawlish United Reformed Church,

May 2006

Charting a New Course



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South Western Synod of the United
Reformed Church



Building Confidence

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1. CONSULTANCY METHOD

- 1.1 The Evangelism Enabler (consultant) met with the elders to prepare for the consultancy and to develop a scope for the consultancy.
- 1.2 The church completed a consultancy questionnaire.
- 1.3 The consultant prepared profiles of the community served by the church including selected statistical information based parts of Dawlish Town Wards (see separate collection).
- 1.4 The consultant met with one of the elders and made a tour of the area.
- 1.5 The consultant met with the minister, elders and members of the congregation to determine:
 - 1.5.1 Significant factors in the community and congregation:
 - 1.5.2 Factors for decline and growth:
 - 1.5.3 The mission issues and priorities that emerged:
 - 1.5.4 To introduce a process for creating a mission strategy:
 - 1.5.5 To reflect upon the values represented in the church.

2. ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT

While having expertise in the field of the Church's mission and church growth the consultant did not come as "the expert"; still less to offer simplistic solutions to complex issues. Those who have the best knowledge of the work of the church are those who are engaged in the local church's mission, namely the minister, eldership team and members. The consultant acts rather as a counsellor whose role is to provide the "tools" that enable the local church leaders to determine for themselves the issues and work out strategies of mission appropriate in their circumstances.

3. SCOPE OF THE CONSULTANCY

The scope of the consultancy as defined by the church in consultation with the Synod Evangelism Enabler was expressed as follows:

The South Western Evangelism Enabling Team shall help Dawlish URC to grow by:

- **Discerning God's call and discovering a common vision for the future**
- **Encouraging the members to discover their potential and possibilities to enrich church life and witness within the community**
- **Deepening and developing a feeling of belonging which is inclusive of all who come through our doors**
- **Discovering the best use and development of the church premises in order to reach out to the community**

3.1 Through the questionnaires that were completed, the community profiles provided by the consultant and the exercises at the consultation a large amount of material has been assembled. This report aims to summarise that material, to highlight the mission issues that arise from it and to provide a foundation for beginning the process of addressing those issues through formulation of an appropriate strategy.

4. PROFILE OF THE COMMUNITY

The statistical material provided in the community profile is based on 2001 census figures. This is currently the most recent, full demographic analysis available.

The attention of the consultation was centred upon parts of Dawlish town wards in the local authority district of Teignbridge in the county of Devon. The area roughly corresponds to that defined by the elders as the Mission Area, making use of statistical Output Areas (OAs).

Dawlish is a small seaside town in Torbay with a population including some neighbouring areas, of 11,246 residents. It is a popular retirement area with a population profile reflecting an older age group. The average age of the Dawlish area is approximately 46 compared with the national average age of 38.6.

Dawlish URC is located in the town centre of Dawlish, opposite a central open area bordered by a brook known as The Lawn which has an outdoor bowling green, bandstand for concerts, deckchairs, Tourist Information Centre, decorative flower beds and hatchery for ducks - Dawlish is famous for its black swans. The immediate area around the church is a largely commercial with residential areas near by. The neighbouring shops, which are either side of the Lawn, are largely geared to the tourist industry with a number of gift shops and amusement arcades, restaurants, pubs and tea shops. The public library is also very close. The main railway line running from the Southwest, runs along the seafront with Dawlish train station at the sea front end of the town.

The housing in the immediate area is mainly small terraced mature housing, some of it originating from the time when the area was a fishing village. Further from the town are areas of newer housing which is mainly owner occupied but with a small amount of council housing. The mission area defined for this

consultancy, made up of 5028 households, also includes the areas to the south of the village of Holcombe as well as some outlying rural areas. There are a number of residential homes and nursing homes in the area.

A number of churches are also in the vicinity including the Methodist church immediately opposite across The Lawn, the Baptist Church, and The Christian Fellowship (independent). The parish church is further away in what seems to be an isolated corner of the area away from the town.

- 4.1 The community in the above area, as revealed by the 2001 census, comprises of 11,246 residents in a total of 5028 households. The original town has been developed outwards, mainly to the north, in recent decades.
- 4.2 Compared to the overall population of England and Wales the area has a lower percentage of males (as 46% v 48.7%); a significantly lower proportion of 20-29's (7.2% v 12.6%) and 30 to 44's (17.6% v 22.6%), and a lower proportion of children and young people under 19 (21% v 25%). There is a higher proportion of 45-59's (20.2% v 18.9%) and a significantly higher proportion of those over 60 (34% v 20.9%). On closer dissemination of the 60+ age group, it is discovered that the higher proportion is accounted for across the group with higher figures for 75+ (15.5% v 7.6%). In general terms the area is older than the national average.
- 4.3 Those who are pensioners (living alone or in couples) is understandably much higher (37% v 23.4%) and accounts for between a quarter and a third of the local population.
- 4.4 The proportion of those aged 16 or over who are married is slightly higher than the national average (53.9% v 50.9%) and those who are widowed is also slightly higher (12.9% v 8.4%) Those who are single, separated or divorced is lower (33.2% v 40.7%). Households that contain no dependent children is much higher (71.2% v 56.6%).
- 4.5 Unemployment is at a lower rate than the national average (2.4% v 3.4%).
- 4.6 The proportion of those whose general health is classified as "Good" is lower than the national average (63% v 68.6%) whilst those whose health is "Fairly good" is higher (25.9% v 22.2%). There is a significantly higher proportion of those with a limiting long term illness (24.4% v 18.2%).
- 4.7 The area has a very low proportion of population that is non-white (1.1% v 8.7% nationally).
- 4.8 There is a high proportion of detached housing compared to England and Wales (31.1% v 22.8%) and also of houses being owned outright (40.6% v 29.5%) Conversely there is a low proportion of homes owned with a mortgage or loan (32.5% v 38.8%).

- 4.9 76.9% of the Dawlish population state that their religion is Christian compared to 71.7% nationally. Those of other religions amount to a tiny 0.8% compared with 5.7% nationally.
- 4.10 There is a higher proportion of households with one car (48.4% v 43.9%)
- 4.11 There is a higher proportion of people in part time work (29.9% v 24.7%) with higher proportions employed by small employers or on their own account (9.3% v 7%) and in the "Not classifiable" category (25% v 17.9%)
- 4.12 The statistics reflect a population which has a higher than average number of retired people, who are largely empty nesters, many owning their homes outright, and who are not wealthy but who have sufficient disposable income to make life comfortable. There is also a lower than average but significant younger population under 45 with those over 45 in a higher proportion. There appear to be many people in part time employment, probably employed locally.

5. PROFILE OF THE CHURCH

5.1 Membership

- 5.1.1 Between 1996 and 2005, Dawlish URC has shown a 12% decline overall in numbers. However there have been particular periods when there was growth. The membership peaked in 1998 at 76 which was a 17% increase on 1996 figures, and has since shown a decline to 57. The peak appears to have been due to an influx of members from other URCs. During the whole 10 years a total of 59 new members have been added (which includes 24 in 1996 from other URCs – the end of year total being 65) and 36 people were lost. However some of these figures cannot be entirely relied upon as no figures were supplied for 7 of the 10 years for those who ceased to be members and attend nowhere. This therefore causes some discrepancy in the figures. 19 have died, at least 10 no longer attend any church. (this could be estimated to be as many as 27 if the discrepancy is read as those lost in this way) 5 have moved to other URC churches and 2 have moved to churches of other denominations. Of those gained in the 10 years, 1 has come into membership on confession of faith, 41 have been received from other URC churches and 2 have come from other denominations.
- 5.1.2 It is clear that any growth that has been achieved is by and large, what would be termed "transfer growth", mainly from other URCs. Only 1 person has come into membership on confession of faith – technically termed "conversion growth". Whilst a church in the situation of Dawlish may well benefit from future transfer growth as a result of more retired people

moving into the area (the proportion of retired people who are already committed Christians will be much higher than younger age groups due to changes in society and the decline of interest in the church over recent decades), such growth must not be relied upon for two main reasons. Firstly that proportion of retired people who already have faith will diminish as the years go by as younger generations get older. Secondly, and more importantly, the church needs to be in the business of proclaiming the gospel to people who currently are not committed to Christ so that conversion growth is achieved. Whilst in this instance we are talking about enlarging the Kingdom of God as fresh people are added to its number (this is not the same as adding people to the church but is a more spiritual growth) the consequence of this is likely to be that the church will also grow in numbers. Thus for practical and theological reasons, ways need to be found of evangelism that will produce real fruit that will last and which will add disciples to the church and the kingdom.

5.2 **Worship**

- 5.2.1 The figures show an overall decline in worship attendance between 1996 and 2001 with morning attendance decreasing from 125 to 50. In the years 1997- 2000 there was a significant decline in attendance from 130 to 65. The figure for 2005 shows an increase from 45 to 50.
- 5.2.2 No Young people have attended worship during the 10 year period.
- 5.2.3 The number of children aged 12 and under attending worship has dropped from 6 to 0 from 1996 to 1999 and has shown an increase to 1 in 2005.
- 5.2.4 In line with current thinking, it should be noted that worship figures should not be confined to Sunday attendance as in many churches, opportunities exist for other forms of activity for all ages, which for many may well be "church" attendance, although would not always be construed as having a worship element. There are no groups at Dawlish which could fall into this category but it is worth bearing in mind for future consideration of figures should other activities develop.

5.3 **Males/females and age profile**

- 5.3.1 The percentage of males in the congregation is 31% and females 69%. This is similar to the experience of other churches although there are a lower proportion of males than in some other churches.
- 5.3.2 There are no children in the church at Dawlish worshipping on a Sunday, although there is a Parents and Toddlers group staffed by the church. This compares with the community

where 17.2% of the local population is under 16. There are also no people under the age of 30 in the church compared to 11% of the local population between the ages of 16 and 29. There is a significantly lower proportion of adults in the 30-44 age group (3.9% v 17.6%). The age groups 20-44 reflect the proportion of adults in the church in the family age brackets which numbers 3 people. The 45-59 age group is also lower (10.4% v 20.2%) In all older age groups the trend is reversed with much higher proportions in the church than the community i.e. 60-64s are 18.2% v 6.4%; 65-74s are 22% v 12.1%; and over 75s are 45.5% v 15.5%. This reflects the higher age profile for the community generally but is still disproportionate to the local population.

- 5.3.3 Whilst it would not be right to neglect mission to older age groups (especially as the community is heavily weighted in this direction), there may be a need to address the lower proportions of adults in the family age groups, (20-44). However there are also issues surrounding the appeal of the church to the younger age groups. There are marked differences in the way those over and under 40 years of age experience faith as has been indicated in recent research, and this will be commented on later. Having said this there may well be a case for focussing on the older population as the “target group” for outreach in Dawlish by Dawlish URC.

5.4 **Mid-week activities**

- 5.4.1 There are a number of groups meeting midweek to cater for various spiritual and social needs across the age ranges. There is 1 group meeting intermittently primarily for Bible study and prayer, with an average attendance of 4. There are also other more socially oriented groups – Knit and Chat meeting fortnightly with 3 new people connected with the church as a result in the last 3 years. Also joint men’s and women’s meetings, choir, Friendship hour and worship group meeting weekly or monthly have various attendances from 4 to 18 and have brought 3 new people into connection with the church in the last 3 years. A weekly Keep Fit group attracts 8-10 people and the weekly parents and toddlers group attracts 5 children and their carers.
- 5.4.2 Experience of growing churches shows that meeting in small groups is vital for the growth of the church, both spiritually and numerically. Whilst the numbers involved in small groups for bible study or prayer is small, these latter groups are the points at which growth can be developed and would be vital in enabling the church in the aim of “Deepening and developing a feeling of belonging which is inclusive of all who come through our doors” (Consultancy scope). More will be said about this later.

5.5 **Mission**

- 5.5.1 Specific outreach activities have included distribution of a church newsletter and other Christian literature. Festival services have also been advertised with the parents and toddlers group. Baptismal services are seen as an opportunity for outreach to families who come. There have also been evangelistic services held at the church. The church is involved in the Good Friday walk of witness, and a regular healing service attracts people who do not normally attend worship. The carnival service and procession is an increasing opportunity with more positive responses from the church and community each year.
- 5.5.2 Community activities include a regular keep fit group, knit and chat, the friendship hour coffee morning and the parents and toddlers group.
- 5.5.3 The church is collectively involved in supporting ecological concerns, St Petrocks homeless shelter, Teignbridge Youth project and Commitment for Life
- 5.5.4 In addition individual members are involved in a number of charity organisations, some on behalf of the church including Christian Aid, Traidcraft, Alcoholics Anonymous, Macmillan nurses, Arthritis care, Tadlets, Local Council, South Devon Railway, Trefoil guild, Rowcroft Hospice & Exeter Hospice, Prison visiting, Dawlish Museum, and Smiles Foundation.
- 5.5.5 Various members were individually consulted to give their opinion on what could be done or changed so that the church might have a more positive impact in mission in the area. Responses included dealing with the building issues, taking more opportunity by offering a monthly outdoor service, relating work situations more closely to church life so that people can be prayed for and supported, and taking an initiative to make Dawlish a Fairtrade town.
- 5.5.6 There are a number of good activities and approaches at Dawlish URC and the opportunities for contact and evangelism through all these things should be made the most of with a more deliberate aim of following up contacts and encouraging further steps to consider steps of faith to be made. The idea of a monthly outdoor service in the summer season, perhaps arranged ecumenically, is an initiative which could produce great fruit if held with an evangelistic purpose in mind. The church is encouraged to follow this idea up with ecumenical partners.

5.6 **Pastoral care**

- 5.6.1 Pastoral care is carried out in the traditional way by the minister alongside the 8 elders and 2 retired ministers. There

is no specific policy on regular visiting but elders have received training using Elders training days, a book on pastoral care and "Refreshing the Elders Meeting" material.

5.6.2 Pastoral care also appears to happen informally through the flower ministry, distribution of the newsletter, a small group network and also an ecumenical support group for bereaved people held in the church foyer.

5.6.3 There is a sense that pastoral care is happening, but this is also an area which should not be left to chance and as a church grows, the systems for pastoral care need to be robust and expanded to cope with this growth. Evangelism can often most effectively be done through pastoral care and should not be limited to care for church members and contacts. Indeed one minister in the consultant's acquaintance said that we should "evangelise the members and pastor the community if we are to truly reach out." There may be some truth in this observation and a better system for pastoral care which ensures people do not "slip through the net" needs to be in place. More will be said later about this.

5.7 Church family list

The church family list stands at 77. Considering the membership is quoted as 57, there is clearly an extended family of the church especially as there are few outside organisations making use of the premises. This "fringe" is a good place to begin the task of evangelistic outreach as those in the fringe category will have a comfort factor in terms of their contact with the church.

5.8 Buildings

The location of the building is in a central position in the town and is well known by locals as "the church with the spire". There are a number of issues with the building which will be better dealt with under the mission issues headings as they form the basis of plans for the future and so further comment will be left to this later section.

5.9 Finances

5.9.1 The finances of the church are in a reasonably healthy state with a tiny deficit of £125 in 2005. Some 7.8% of expenditure went to mission work in a local and wider context in 2005. In 2004, this figure was 8.7% and in 2003 it was 14.7% and has thus reduced in recent years. It is also noted that income has decreased significantly in 2005, by approximately 12.7% from 2004. However it appears that 2004 may have been unusual as previous years have averaged similar figures to 2005. What is a concern is that income is not increasing at a regular rate.

- 5.9.2 It is recommended that Dawlish URC conducts a TRIO (The Responsibility Is Ours) programme – or its new alternative based on the ACT (Acclaim Christ Together) document produced by the URC Life and Witness Committee – to challenge the whole church about regular and proportionate giving. If the church is to further its outreach and make significant steps in development as detailed in this report, an increase in financial income will be vital to release the necessary resources. The consultant can advise on steps to take in conducting TRIO or ACT.
- 5.9.3 It is also suggested that consideration be given to a rise in proportionate giving away to mission, outreach and overseas aid. There is a spiritual principle that if we honour giving away to mission, God will honour our giving and growth. If finances are considered as a whole, and such steps taken, God can begin to bless the finances of the church as well as other areas. Many churches now consider tithing their income (10% and in some cases much more) as a basis for working and as a model for members to also follow in tithing their income to the church and other charities. The URC has suggested that members might give 5% of their disposable income (income after tax and national insurance but before mortgages etc.) – in other words half a tithe, with the other half tithe being offered to other charitable and mission activities. It is estimated that in most churches, an increase of giving to 5% would double the churches income on average.

5.10 **Staff and leadership**

- 5.10.1 The staff team consists of the minister, Revd. Helen Pope, who is part time paid but about to resign as minister as she enlarges her family. The rest of the staff team are made up of the officers of the church (secretary and treasurer) and various other people responsible for various areas of church life. A heavy load is borne by the church secretary who also is responsible for cleaning, caretaking, flowers, bookings, the notice board and Christians Together.
- 5.10.2 The leadership is comprised of a team of 8 elders currently. There are also a small number of retired ministers who continue to serve the church in various ways through regular preaching, pastoral care, the church newsletter etc.

5.11 **Ecumenical relationships**

- 5.11.1 There are good links with the Methodist Church across the Lawn and involvement with Christians Together in Dawlish. One of the main influencers in the town is seen as the URC itself, it having a prominent position in the town centre and being known in the area as “the church with the spire”.

5.11.2 There are also links with St. Gregory's C/E who use the foyer for their coffee mornings and the Christian Fellowship who sell Traidcraft produce at the URC Wednesday coffee morning. A support group for bereaved people has been run ecumenically in the foyer and ecumenical prayers have also take place in the URC on Wednesdays. The URC and Methodist church hold an Iona style service every other month in the URC (other months being at the Methodist church) and there are lunches held in Lent and united services throughout the year.

5.12 **SWOT Exercise**

The strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats for the church as perceived by those who attended a 'SWOT' exercise at a previous date, and then added to by additional votes of those who attended the consultation, are recorded in Appendix A

6. MISSION ISSUES

- 6.1 A first draft was made of a list combining the consultant's observations with other comments and those derived from the Friday evening session. They are listed in Appendix D. This proposed list was clarified in plenary session and after further discussion, a final list was agreed, upon which voting to establish priorities took place.
- 6.2 The final list of Mission Issues was placed in order after voting – letters are those assigned for purposes of the exercise – numbers in brackets are scores from the prioritising exercise.
- 6.2.1 **M. (11) Deepen the spiritual life of the church through the development of house groups/prayer groups etc.**
 - 6.2.2 **K. (11) Develop better publicity and distribution of leaflets, and improve the notice board and entrance doors and area**
 - 6.2.3 **I. (11) Develop the buildings to best support the mission objectives of the church**
 - 6.2.4 **D. (9) Develop more activity groups meeting on church premises as an opportunity to offer friendship and share the love of Jesus**
 - 6.2.5 **L. (7) Develop and train a welcome team to improve greeting at the door**
 - 6.2.6 **B. (7) Develop Pastoral care as an evangelistic opportunity – offering care and friendship to elderly and lonely people**
 - 6.2.7 **H. (7) Develop midweek activity (Alpha?) or alternative worship opportunity to try and attract "Christian" non attenders**

- 6.2.8 E. (5) Find ways of reaching out to and bridging the gap with the parents and toddlers group
- 6.2.9 F. (4) Create a transport scheme to enable those who need it to attend church activities
- 6.2.10 A. (2) Should the church target empty nesters? (44-59s)
- 6.2.11 G. (2) Take time to discern the rightness or otherwise of developing ministry to young people
- 6.2.12 J. (1) Investigate ways of supporting single parents in Dawlish
- 6.2.13 C. (1) Take opportunity to develop contacts with residential and nursing homes

7. CAUSES OF DECLINE AND SIGNS OF GROWTH

Those attending the consultation shared in exercises to identify causes of decline and signs of growth. Votes were added together to give a picture of the situation (see appendices B and C). The following factors were identified:

- 7.1 Some issues were seen as major or very serious problems, those being Maintenance complex where 52% of those voting saw it as a very serious or major problem; similarly Failure syndrome was seen as a major or very serious problem by 65%, as was cultural blindness by 52% and premises paralysis by 65%. Most other issues under Causes of Decline were seen as equally major or minor problems (with slight variations in strength of feeling here). Fellowshipitis was seen by just over half those voting as no problem, with others seeing it as mainly a minor problem. Leadership Tensions was seen as some kind of problem by all but 1 voting, and equal spread between those who saw it as a minor problem, and those who saw it as a major or very serious problem. Nominality was nearly equally spread between those who saw it as a major or a minor problem. All this indicates a church that is generally aware of its own problems and conscious that there are areas that need work and improvement.
- 7.2 Under signs of growth, no areas stood out as outstandingly strong, although Effective Leadership scored highly with 2 seeing it as very strong and 15 as Strong. Other scores were more or less equally spread between strong or weak with a slight tendency to err on the side of weak except for agapistic relationships which was seen as slightly stronger than weak.
- 7.3 From this exercise and with reference to the appendices it can be gleaned that those present at the consultation have an honest view of themselves, with a clear sense that there are many areas of weakness. This was born out by the SWOT exercise and although the church appears to be in good heart, there are clearly concerns about an aging congregation who cannot do what they would like to be able to do. There is however also a sense of vision and determination to achieve

some goals. The consultant was struck by this vision and a commitment to serve a real purpose in the area. These themes will be developed in more detail below.

8. CONGREGATIONAL VALUES

Those attending the consultation were invited to reflect upon and place in order their values in relation to the church's life with the following definition before them:

'A value is a quality considered inherently worthwhile or desirable. In the church it is what you cherish most and believe to be of absolute importance if the church is to be what you want it to be.'

8.1 Voting ordered the values as follows from 3 different groups numbered E.1 – E.3 as indicated in appendix E. The results were collated into a complete list for the whole church by the consultant by working out the score for each value (highest received 10 etc.) and multiplying the total score for that value by the number of groups which included it in their list. The following list is the result in order of highest value first. Any values created by the groups are in italic lower case.

- 8.1.1 MEANINGFUL WORSHIP
- 8.1.2 PRAYERFULNESS
- 8.1.3 RELEVANT PREACHING
- 8.1.4 WARM FELLOWSHIP
- 8.1.5 SPIRITUAL GROWTH
- 8.1.6 EVANGELICAL SPIRIT
- 8.1.7 GOOD MUSIC AND SINGING
- 8.1.8 SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS
- 8.1.9 SOCIAL AWARENESS
- 8.1.10 EVERY PERSON MINISTRY
- 8.1.11 CLEAR DOCTRINES
- 8.1.12 ECUMENICAL EMPHASIS
- 8.1.13 COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY
- 8.1.14 *Personal Integrity*

- 8.1.15 PEACE
- 8.1.16 PASSION FOR JUSTICE
- 8.1.17 TRADITION
- 8.1.18 VIBRANT YOUTH WORK

8.2 Comment was made by one or two participants about the validity and usefulness of this exercise, particularly relating to the scoring given for each value. Whilst there may be some weaknesses in this fairly crude method of establishing underlying values in the church, it is still important to recognize that it is often such values which will shape and help or hinder a church's progress. The values above do not have their scores attached but are in the order those scores revealed, which is the more valuable part of the exercise, showing those things which the local church hold dear.

9. REFLECTIONS ON THE MISSION ISSUES, VALUES AND LIFE

- 9.1 The consultant received a very warm welcome at Dawlish URC and was grateful for the amount of preparation that the minister and elders particularly had put into the process. There was a sense of prayer surrounding the whole process and it was clear that the church was eager and expectant about the consultancy process.
- 9.2 There was an encouraging attendance at the consultation weekend with 40% of the members there. Those who came were concerned, enthusiastic and committed to seeing God do a new work of development and growth in their midst in the coming years. Everyone worked hard and the consultant was impressed with their genuine determination to move forward.
- 9.3 Dawlish URC is a church that has already begun to take mission seriously. This is evidenced by the fact that the consultant was invited to the church to help in this area and also by the number of activities which are held which seek to make contact with the community. There is however also a need to sharpen what is already happening so that the evangelistic part of mission can be honed and people are reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 9.4 The United Reformed Church has adopted the Five Marks of Mission (first formulated by the Lambeth Conference of 1988 and then endorsed in their present form in 1997 by the Forum of Churches Together in England) as the basis for all its work. These are summarised as:
- **Tell** - to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;
 - **Teach** - to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
 - **Tend** - to respond to human need by loving service;
 - **Transform** - to seek to transform unjust structures of society;
 - **Treasure** - to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth.
- 9.5 Many United Reformed Churches would appear to be very committed to the final three areas of these 5 marks but that in the first 2 areas there are some weaknesses, and it is these areas which this report will be mainly concerned with. The mission issues which emerged are clearly concerned with these areas as well.
- 9.6 There are a number of areas to be addressed and I wish to highlight them by placing them under various headings:
- **Developing shared vision, spiritual life and growth**
 - **Building skills in evangelism**
 - **Developing pastoral skills as an evangelistic tool**
 - **Developing the premises to support mission**
 - **Profile and publicity**

- 9.7 These headings have come out of the self discovery of the participants on the consultancy weekend and they are placed in something of a deliberate order. It cannot be argued too strongly that building vision and developing spiritual life and growth need to precede all other concerns if the church is to grow in the other areas. To try to deal with practicalities before setting about building the foundations is like building on sand. To use a nautical image, it is important to have reliable charts and a sound engine with a reliable source of fuel before setting out of harbour. With the firm foundations in place and a developing spiritual life, churches can become more open to the possibility of change and issues around premises are more easily resolved as a common vision is shared.
- 9.8 It will become clear that there is some overlap between these areas, and in many ways each will feed the other. However not everything can be done at once as it would create a project far too unwieldy to manage. Thus it is important to see what comes below as a series of observations which can be used to put together a long term plan over perhaps 5 or 10 years, and so change can come gradually and realistically, yet also can be seen to be happening.
- 9.9 It is clear that not every mission issue has a specifically evangelistic aspect to it, but it is true to say that all are focused ultimately in this way. In reality the whole of church life needs to be focussed in mission, and evangelism needs to be at the heart of everything the church does. Evangelism is not a separate activity which the church does once or twice a year or only in certain contexts. An evangelistic attitude needs to pervade every single activity so that there is a strong motivation by every member of the church to reach out to those around them with the love of Jesus Christ.
- 9.10 The above sections have begun to reflect on the church's life and its community and reference will be made back to these summaries. The subject matter of this section is to consider the mission issues which have arisen so that a mission action plan might be developed which will help the *"members to discover their potential and possibilities to enrich church life and witness within the community"* (from scope of consultancy). At the end of the day, it is the local church which will need to develop this plan as they are the ones who will have to create, own and implement it. Section 10 will outline practical steps that can be used to enable progress to be made.
- 9.11 It is with these initial points in mind that the comments below seek to build on existing foundations as well as offer suggestions for new ways of working in the future.

9.12 **DEVELOPING SHARED VISION, SPIRITUAL LIFE AND GROWTH**

Shared Vision

- 9.12.1 The sharing of a common vision is vital if the church is to move forward. When vision is shared, the burden to fulfil that vision is also shared and more people become involved. The

question arises as to what it is the church is working towards? Is there a sense of simply desiring the church to grow by getting more people to attend worship or is there a need to have a higher aim of establishing the Kingdom of God in the community and of bringing people into that kingdom? A reading of the gospels will show that Jesus' concern was not for the church (it is in fact hardly mentioned) but that he came to proclaim God's sovereignty over society and a need to bring people under that sovereignty. It is thus important to establish higher aims than simply enlarging an organisation. Once this higher aim becomes part of the inbuilt thinking of a church, structures and methods will become subservient to this higher aim and it will be easier to make radical changes to church life which will be seen as the means by which the kingdom can be enlarged.

- 9.12.2 It is encouraging to know that the church has produced a mission statement: It is
***Following the example of CHRIST,
 OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP
 exists to love God and our neighbour with sincerity;
 Through worship, prayer, fellowship, guidance and
 healing, to help all deepen their relationship with God
 and equip all to serve the community with care,
 compassion and commitment.
 To the Glory of GOD.***
- 9.12.3 This statement clearly has a Kingdom focus, and although it lacks perhaps the evangelistic thrust that is needed in Dawlish URC, there is a sense of mission through the loving of neighbour and service to the community. What it does emphasise is the deepening of relationship with God and it is this emphasis which needs to take priority if the church is to grow.
- 9.12.4 It is said that the mission or vision statement needs to be reiterated before the church in some way every week, for the church to become focused on what it is doing. This need not be a repeat of the statement in the same way but it could be brought in through the sermon, through prayers, through a comment made in the notices, through the offering and in many other ways. It could be a subheading on weekly news sheets or as a sub-heading attached to every Power Point slide. In these ways it becomes part of the unconscious thinking of the church and will in time mould the church's progress.
- 9.12.5 It is suggested that one way the church could do this is to embark upon a series of sermons and teaching opportunities, based on vision and purpose. This could make good use of the mission statement the church has already agreed to, perhaps by taking each heading in turn and offering teaching on this over a period of several weeks or months. Whilst it is

understood that the present minister, Revd. Helen Pope, will be leaving in June 2006 and thus there might be less obvious opportunity for consistent preaching, the resource of retired ministers in the church as well as other visiting preachers may well be able to fulfil such a challenge if the elders took time to develop a preaching plan with this concept in mind. An explanatory paper on the aims and purpose of such a preaching plan could be drawn up and circulated to visiting preachers along with the dates and themes allocated for that particular week. This could also be publicised in the magazine and an attractive leaflet produced with the themes printed so that members were aware of what was coming.

9.12.6 Such themes based on the mission statement could include:

- The example of Christ
- The Church
- Loving God
- Loving our neighbour with care and compassion
- Worship
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Guidance
- Healing
- Relationship with God
- Service
- Commitment and sincerity

This would provide a 12 week programme which might well cover a longer period with breaks and festivals in between.

9.12.7 Additionally it would be helpful to find a more succinct phrase which is easily remembered by the church and which can be used on publications, letterheads, posters etc. One church used the phrase "Knowing Christ and making Him known". Another used "Becoming Disciples to Make Disciples" Both of these phrases are easily remembered and sum up in a few words the main thrust of the church's purpose. Dawlish URC could develop it's own, based on the existing statement.

Spiritual life and growth - PRAYER

9.12.8 It is significant to note that the development of house groups/prayer groups came at the top of the list of prioritised Mission Issues (see 6.2) and in the listing of congregational values, prayerfulness achieved the second to top ranking overall (see 8.1). It is clear that prayer is something that is

important to many members at Dawlish URC. However, the challenge is how much of that prayer is corporate, structured, focused and fervent?

- 9.12.9 Prayerfulness is by its nature a very difficult animal to define. It is impossible to tell how much people pray or how much people need to pray! What is however important is that prayer, and particularly corporate prayer, becomes the power house from which all else flows. Without prayer it is worthless continuing along any course in church life, as prayer will provide the power needed to carry out God's calling on the church and it will also provide the means to discern that calling in the first place. Thus prayer can only really become a central part of the church's life when a "culture of prayer" prevails and people naturally say "let's pray about it" when a decision needs to be made or a problem solved.
- 9.12.10 Prayer can be incorporated into almost every aspect of church life so that it becomes more than simply an opening devotion at a meeting, but the essential element at all levels. However prayer needs to be learnt. Patience is needed to encourage those for whom corporate prayer is foreign or difficult. Long wordy prayers offered by those who are more experienced in leading in prayer can be intimidating to those who have never before prayed out loud in company and so sensitivity and teaching are required to encourage corporate prayer. Similarly many will have experienced and appreciate different styles of prayer and one rigid pattern typical of the church prayer meeting may not be appropriate for all. What is certainly true is that prayer has the added benefit of enabling people to get to know each other better. Praying with others opens up relationships so that in sharing needs, people become more vulnerable with each other and are better able to share at other levels as well.
- 9.12.11 A common aspect of growing churches is that its prayer life will be strong and ways of encouraging prayerfulness need to be found. One useful tool is a prayer diary which can form the backbone of a church's prayer life. This might take the form of prayer listings in the church magazine or the weekly sheet which currently replaces the magazine until a new editor is found. Such a publication produced as part of the general life of the church brings prayer into the heart of all that is happening, and is to be encouraged. Prayer focus on issues concerning mission and evangelism can also create a climate of mission mindedness which will rub off on other areas of church life.
- 9.12.12 A further spin off of corporate and systematic prayer can be that the aims resulting from the use of the mission statement can become commonly held and owned by the whole church. When different aspects of that mission statement are prayed

through, people will begin to see such aims as more than simply words on paper but values to aim for.

- 9.12.13 A helpful book dealing with developing the prayer life of a church is *"The church on its knees"* by Jeremy Jennings (Published by HTB Publications) which comes out of the experience of developing prayer at Holy Trinity, Brompton, the home of the Alpha Course.
- 9.12.14 It is suggested that prayer be incorporated into small groups, as detailed in the next section, and that this becomes the focus for the prayer life of the church. House groups are the natural venue for this where concerns can be shared, but where also wider issues can be brought to the groups. It is important that help is given and this perhaps could be done through the appointment of a Prayer Co-ordinator or Secretary who, being a person committed to prayer themselves, could feed items for prayer into small groups, church magazines, weekly services etc. Perhaps a prayer chain using the telephone or email could also be established enabling individuals, especially housebound people, to pray for needs as they arise, and as an extra benefit bring meaning and involvement to those no longer able to get to church so frequently.

Spiritual life and growth - SMALL GROUPS

- 9.12.15 It seems from the consultant's perspective that the central focus of Dawlish URC is the church premises. Whilst there are many other aspects to church life, the overriding feeling was that everything that happened needed to be centred on the church building and that its care, upkeep and use was of high importance. Whilst there may well be a case for making good and better use of the premises – this will be looked at in another section below – a reminder is needed that the church is essentially the people of God. This does not necessarily need to be people gathered in one place, but can be in many places and forms.
- 9.12.16 There are many models of church which do not necessarily rely on a traditional image of a congregation of people meeting each Sunday in a church building. At the heart of church is relationships. We all need to meet in different contexts to be able to gain and offer different things to feed each other's faith. Research in growing churches has shown that they give space for three different kinds of meetings to cater for these different needs. Firstly the **Celebration** level of meeting will enable people to gather in large numbers to facilitate a sense of belonging to something bigger and to enable expressions of joy and exuberance as well as to be inspired. This may often be in a joint church or town or area wide setting. The second level of meeting is **Congregation** which facilitates a sense of belonging and social interaction.

This might number between 20 and 70 people. The third level of meeting is termed **Cell** and might contain from 3 to 15 people who meet together for more intimate sharing, prayer and support and is based on personal relationships.

- 9.12.17 A characteristic of all growing churches is a well developed small group structure and those which are growing fastest will have made this a priority early on in their life. Such groups enable the spiritual life of the church to grow through a more intimate fellowship than is possible on a Sunday. Small groups give the opportunity for people to receive deeper teaching, question their beliefs, share their personal needs and find new friendships in the church. If prayer is to be a greater priority in the church's life, an organised plan for prayer could be introduced as a part of the small group activities so that the whole church is praying together in a cohesive and systematic way.
- 9.12.18 If Dawlish URC is to deepen its spiritual life, as stated in the first mission issue, House groups will need to be at the heart of this and the formation of a system of small groups is a priority. This might be done, with a link into the above suggestion of a systematic series of sermons based on the mission statement. If material was prepared then groups could discuss the bible passages used and the issues raised on the previous Sunday. Another way of doing this would be to use a pre-prepared course such as the Emmaus course. This has a number of sections and modules and begins with a focus on deepening a relationship with God but goes on to training in evangelism as well as many other areas. For a church in vacancy this may well provide a better way forward.
- 9.12.19 With proper preparation, a personal challenge to every home in the church through a visit from an elder with an explanatory letter of invitation, and regular preaching and guidance, this kind of short term programme can empower a church in a new way. Once the short term programme is over (indeed thought needs to be given several weeks before it is finished), most groups will have enjoyed the experience so much that they will want to carry on as a permanent group.
- 9.12.20 In two separate churches in the consultant's own experience, a determined effort was made to make a series of small group meetings based on a specific course central to the church's life for a short period (in one case "Alpha" and in another, an older, now out of print course called "One Step Forward"). This was the catalyst in turning both churches around in their thinking and in deepening spirituality and a heart to reach out to those who don't yet know Jesus. Some lengthy preparation time was allowed to advertise the course, train group leaders with some outside help, write to every church member, and in some cases visit every home. By profiling the course in such a way, in both cases some 50-

75% of the membership signed up to be a part of a small group. These met weekly for 10-12 weeks. In the case of Alpha, a day together was also held. The result in both cases was a renewal of the spiritual life of the church (this even rubbed off on those who did not go to groups) and a desire for all the groups to continue for an indefinite period.

- 9.12.21 A key to small groups is to give adequate forward planning so that people have something to look forward to and a longer term vision to grasp. Groups should also be flexible with the possibility of slightly different styles of approach to suit the participants. Some may wish to spend some time in worship using music on CD or a guitar or piano, whilst others will not. Prayer will be a stronger focus in some whilst others will want to do more solid bible study. As long as all the ingredients of fellowship, prayer, bible study and worship are present to some degree there is no reason why groups cannot operate slightly differently yet follow the same material. All groups will be held together by fellowship and adequate time needs to be given for this each week, with coffee and chat. In addition it is good for groups to take a break to have a purely social evening once every month or two, perhaps with a trip to a local pub, a picnic or a barbeque in the summer, or a trip to the theatre. Be normal and do the things you might do with your friends – after all they are friends as well!
- 9.12.22 Further to this approach may be the possibility of seeing the small groups as an evangelistic opportunity in the church's life. If groups are strategically located in a geographic area and the focus is extended from simply fellowship and bible study to a wider concern for the neighbourhood in which they are set, this would provide a motivation for the groups to see themselves as agents of mission in the area they serve. To take this step requires a change in focus and attitude as home groups can often become inward looking and insular. They are rightly there to serve the spiritual development of the members, and this is in itself an important factor in developing the outreach motivation of a church as such discipleship development will naturally lead to a desire to reach others with the gospel. However the potential for small groups to be used in this wider way is enormous and needs to be tapped. The opportunity for social activity can provide a particularly good "way in" for those who might be invited to a small group.
- 9.12.23 This has much to do with the changing culture of our society and the need in the un-churched or de-churched parts of society for relationships and not for traditionally religious activities. As post modern culture develops a more isolationist mentality, so the natural need for relationships is highlighted as it is frequently not met for many people. If opportunities for meeting that relationship need can be made then the gospel can be a natural part of those relationships.

Increasingly food can be the focal point! The Alpha programme has shown great success because one of the attractions is that people are invited to share in an informal evening where faith is discussed in an open way with “no strings attached”, and where a meal provides the “ice breaker” for discussion and the removing of barriers.

9.12.24 One of the greatest difficulties in moving on from Alpha has been the incorporation of Alpha participants who have no church experience into the life of the church. The movement from an informal, relaxed, small group setting where discussion and disagreement are possible and where each person is valued and honoured, to a church setting where frequently, because of size, people are not so clearly honoured and affirmed and where there is a system of delivery of something about which questions are not invited, can be difficult and intimidating. The development of small group meetings as a basis for church can offer the bridge between church life and society at large whilst providing in a very real way, not an alternative to church, but the reality of church itself.

9.12.25 It is for all these reasons that the development of a home group network should be of a high priority in shaping the future life of Dawlish URC and should be focussed on as well as the pressing issues of the development of the premises.

9.13 BUILDING SKILLS IN EVANGELISM

9.13.1 There are few short cuts when it comes to building skills and confidence in any area of life. This is particularly true of evangelism.

9.13.2 In what at first appears to be a society which is closed to the gospel and alien to Christian values, it is clear through the research carried out by David Haye and Kate Hunt (noted in the section below) that – to the contrary – there is in fact an openness to spiritual concerns and that the church has a real opportunity to share its beliefs if sensitivity and an openness to change are employed. Confidence in doing anything is usually only achieved when one dares to have a go (or to put it more spiritually, step out in faith!). The person who has broken their leg and has been bed ridden for several weeks will lose the confidence to walk without falling over again unless they are willing (and sometimes forced by physiotherapists) to take the first steps with the help of suitable walking aids. The same is true in evangelism. Confidence is gained when perhaps 4 things are in place:

- There is a desire to reach out to others
- There is a spiritual foundation of faith and understanding

- Support is available in how to do it
- It is actually done and reflected on

9.13.3 It appears to the consultant that, at least from the responses given at the consultation, the first of these are already there. The fact that he has been invited to consult with the church shows a real desire to reach out. However it also appears that the church needs support in discovering how to share faith and lead people into faith themselves. There is clearly an ability to welcome people into various groups that meet on the premises, but the next steps of inviting them and encouraging them to think about deeper issues and to discover God for themselves need to be taken.

9.13.4 Evangelism is not simply about presenting a certain set of beliefs and inviting people to “jump on board”. Evangelism today is much more clearly understood to involve a “process” whereby individuals might make a number of steps over a considerable period of time. This might involve attendance at worship services or special events, but is much more likely to involve the quiet witness of friends and family as they are prepared to talk and listen, engaging at a deep level and willing to face searching questions. It will also be better facilitated by a clearer understanding of the process many people go through in finding faith and having right an clear expectations of what can be achieved through certain aspects of evangelism.

9.13.5 This will be consolidated as the spiritual life of the church is deepened and as God creates an urgency in the hearts of His people, not just to arrest decline and increase membership, but to bring new people into a relationship with himself through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Thus once again there is an urgent need to take the practical steps necessary to build up the spiritual life of the congregation through the development of cell groups and other means.

9.13.6 Finally actually doing it will be the greatest contributor to building confidence in evangelism. When people are encouraged to share their faith in particular contexts with mutual support and adequate preparation, confidence is built. One church took the step of using a student mission to go out in pairs to the homes in their neighbourhood to do a survey of community needs and ask questions about the place of the church in the community and personal belief. Proper training was given and much prayer went into the project. Some 20 people were prepared to pair up with the visiting students and they went out the first evening in fear and trepidation. However when they returned 2 hours later their demeanour was transformed. Very few had met with any resistance to being engaged about faith and community concerns. Most had been warmly welcomed and had found people willing to

talk at sometimes quite deep levels. The confidence of the local church members who had never done this sort of thing before was increased by several levels and all were eager to go out again the following evening and not wait until later in the week, such had been success of the experience.

- 9.13.7 Several of the mission issues raise needs for support. 6.2.4 says **“Develop more activity groups meeting on church premises as an opportunity to offer friendship and share the love of Jesus”** and 6.2.7 says **“Develop midweek activity (Alpha?) or alternative worship opportunity to try and attract “Christian” non attenders”**. Dawlish URC at present is a church which has an older age profile than the community, but which also caters well for those older people. In this regard it could be said that the church should focus on an older age group as it is also true that the community age profile is older than the national average. It is therefore suggested that activities and approaches to evangelism outlined below could begin at aiming for those in older age groups. This approach makes good use of the resources available currently in the church and would be in keeping with recent experience. Any mid-week groups or alternative worship opportunities should perhaps initially have this in mind.
- 9.13.8 It should however be born in mind that a longer term aim would be to broaden the age profile of the church, perhaps with a desire to eventually target younger families. Thus a strategy needs to be established over a period of perhaps 5 years. It is suggested that whilst other mission issues are worked through, there might be prayer and discussion on a long term strategy with a question asked as to whether and when it is right to target younger families and perhaps youth. This was a mission issue raised in the consultation. Help can be given by the Evangelism Enabling Team to enable the church to draw a strategy that may be realistic, practical and imaginative.
- 9.13.9 If younger families are to be targeted in the longer term, the existing connections with parents and toddlers may be a first step in that direction. This was also raised in 6.2.8; “Find ways of reaching out to and bridging the gap with the parents and toddlers group.” One way of fulfilling this issue would be to offer a parenting course which might attract some interest from this group as well as a wider group of parents. This would need to be done well and at a professional level, but this might be achieved with the help of such an organisation as “Care for the Family” (Care for the Family, PO Box 488, Cardiff. CF15 7YY. Tel: (029) 2081 0800, Email: Care.for.the.family@ccf.org.uk, Website: www.care-for-the-family.org.uk) which is dedicated to proclaiming the gospel through offering practical support to families and churches seeking to reach out to families.

- 9.13.10 These plans and issues highlight some of the practical arrangements that could be made to facilitate conversation and engagement, but there is still a deeper need for training and confidence building in the people at Dawlish URC. It is therefore suggested that a course on personal evangelism be run so that church members can be equipped to better understand the basics of their faith, and also to be able to relate what they believe to those they have contact with in the community. The consultant would be willing to return at a later date to offer such a course. He is currently offering a 6 session introductory course on personal evangelism called "Over the Threshold" which can best be offered over a weekend, perhaps away from the church as a church family house-party, but which can also form the basis of a number of weekly sessions or perhaps 2 one day sessions. Alternatively the CPAS "Lost for Words" course can also be run over a longer period of several weeks with a specific aim of equipping people in sharing their faith at a personal level. There are other churches in the Dawlish area who are also considering this course so it may be appropriate to offer this to several churches on a shared basis. Details are available on request.

Crossing the Culture gap

- 9.13.11 Whilst not raised as a mission issue, the problem of the cultural gap between church and society is something which the consultant believes Dawlish URC needs to examine. It is true to say that in many ways, the population of Dawlish would be more accustomed to church culture than many other URCs as the population is more elderly and therefore perhaps in touch with church ways. However this will not be universally true and will certainly not apply to the many younger people of the Dawlish community.
- 9.13.12 Recent research has shown that old assumptions about what people know about Christian faith are no longer valid. An axis around the age of 40 has been discerned which indicates that those above this age will generally speaking be aware of basic Christian truths and will have an underlying "Christian memory". They will be people who grew up having been taught the gospel story at school and will most likely have had contact with Sunday School and church in the past. Those below this age axis are less likely to have had this Christian teaching in childhood and a whole generation is now emerging who have no Christian teaching at all. Thus for many of them the name of Jesus is literally only a swear word and for many there is no concept that He was an historical figure let alone the Son of God. Yet what is clear from research by David Haye and Kate Hunt who are part of the Adults Spirituality Project based at Nottingham University, is that those below 40 still express patterns of spiritual experience (as do people from all ages even though they may

have no faith) but they will lack a language to articulate spiritual matters. (See their paper *"Understanding the spirituality of people who don't go to church"*)

- 9.13.13 Such understanding needs to be taken on board by the church so that outreach can be adapted to make it easier for people to cross the threshold of the church. This will often only be achieved by relationships with un-churched people and a consistent witness to the difference knowing God makes in our lives.
- 9.13.14 In *"Finding Faith Today"* by John Finney, his research showed that almost all effective evangelism is based on personal relationships and that the highest proportion of people surveyed were brought to faith as the result of friends or relatives bringing them to church or having a relationship with them which influenced their thinking.
- 9.13.15 Consideration also needs to be given to the need to bridge the culture gap. Cultural Blindness was seen by 20 out of 23 in the Causes of Decline as some kind of problem, with 12 out of 23 votes seeing it as a major or very serious problem. The traditional nature of worship may well be of great help to most if not all who attend worship, but if we are to attract others, such forms may well seem dull, uninviting and irrelevant in a culture which does not sit in pews to sing 18th and 19th century poetry to old tunes played on an organ.
- 9.13.16 It is important for the church to discover fresh ways of worshipping which are much more in tune with the way people live their lives. Ways of achieving this will involve a radical departure from the routine of traditional church to which we have grown accustomed, and the incorporation of different styles of worship which are less threatening and which identify with the language, music and style of un-churched people in a post modern age.
- 9.13.17 Such churches as Willow Creek in the USA have adopted a pattern of church which takes the traditional gospel message and presents it in a form which is understandable by those who do not go to church. They have in fact given over their Sunday worship services to a "seeker friendly" form of worship which uses contemporary music, drama, visual aids and simple straightforward presentation of the gospel to communicate with visitors who are brought to church by those already committed. The up-building and worship of the committed membership has been moved to a weeknight so that emphasis is given to evangelism and outreach rather than to maintenance of the faithful, whilst the latter is still made a priority to equip those who are already committed to Christ.

- 9.13.18 Some churches have adopted and adapted such methods with varying degrees of success. Some have sought to transform their whole worship but most who have seen success have run regular monthly or bi-monthly services of this nature, often based around themes pertinent to today's world, such as money, world peace, sex, power, the environment etc. A useful resource for this approach can be found through RUN – the Reaching the Un-churched Network. PO Box 387, Aylesbury. HP21 8WH. Tel. 08707 873635 – www.run.org.uk
The Willow Creek Association (UK) will also be able to help in this regard at PO Box 966, Southampton. SO15 2WT. Tel 08451 300909 Email info@willowcreek.org.uk

9.14 DEVELOPING PASTORAL SKILLS AS AN EVANGELISTIC TOOL

- 9.14.1 The sixth listed Mission Issue was **“Develop Pastoral care as an evangelistic opportunity – offering care and friendship to elderly and lonely people”**. Pastoral care is at the heart of practical expression of the gospel, but it needs to be noted that this cannot and should be left to the minister alone who does not have the time or emotional capacity to cope with every pastoral issue that arises. Furthermore, Dawlish URC is about to lose their minister anyway so there will be no one person to rely on. Such a reliance is also not biblical as the pattern of the New Testament is team working with a recognition of different spiritual gifts, including those concerned in pastoral care. The URC standard pattern is to put this in the hands of the elders, but not all elders feel called to this specific ministry.
- 9.14.2 It is encouraging that a team is in place, but this team is clearly based on the eldership plus the valuable help of 2 retired ministers in the congregation. The question needs to be raised as to whether this is the most effective pattern of pastoral care to be offered or whether there may be others in the church with pastoral gifts who might be well used in this way.
- 9.14.3 There also does not seem to be a policy of regular visiting of members and others. It is likely that people are well cared for but whilst this may appear to work on the surface, problems can often occur when people slip through the net. There may come a time of illness or other need and if someone in the church is not aware of that need or neglectful in following it up, those in need can become disenchanting with the church perhaps seeing it as uncaring. If a church begins to grow, this problem can become even more acute as people are forgotten and not everyone knows everyone else. Thus a better system which does not leave things to chance might be more effective.

- 9.14.4 In addition it is important to see the evangelistic opportunity that there is in pastorally caring for people. Jesus said "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." that John 13:35 (NLT) It is essentially through our caring that others will turn to Christ and although we need to find ways of explaining our faith and using events to challenge people about commitment, it is the love we have for people which will count the most. In a situation such as Dawlish, where there may well be opportunity of a large amount of contact with local community members through weekly activities, and a fringe of people might be built up who are loosely connected with the church, a proper system of pastoral care with people equipped to care and also explain the gospel could be a valuable asset in reaching out to others. In addition, because of the age profile of the area, there are clearly a large number of more elderly and lonely people in the community. Thus offering real relationships with people who are concerned for them will present evangelistic opportunities which will need careful follow up.
- 9.14.5 It is suggested that the present pastoral arrangements be reviewed at the earliest opportunity with a view to developing the team. This in no way implies criticism of the current arrangements. Indeed the consultant has no information about the effectiveness or otherwise of the present team and it may well be that what is already in place works as well as any alternative. But it may also be that there are better ways of making use of the gifts in the church and a new team might come into being. Consideration should also be given to ways in which evangelistic opportunities which arise can be best taken advantage of. Thus any new team might include some who have a particular ability to not only come alongside people, but also an ability to explain the gospel in simple terms to those who ask questions. It may be there are some who do not yet know how to do this, but feel God is nudging them in this direction and are willing to learn.
- 9.14.6 This team may well comprise of some of the existing elders who feel a clear call to this ministry and will also draw into it a number of others in the church. There would be a need for a pastoral co-ordinator, selected for their "pastoral heart" as well as their organisational skills, who would work in cooperation with the rest of the elders to ensure that there was proper communication. This is particularly needed in a time of vacancy and will set a system in place which any future minister would value. Each team member would have a list constructed perhaps on the basis of existing relationships or perhaps in conjunction with a system of home groups. There would be an understanding that matters discussed with pastoral team members were strictly confidential and the pastoral team would need to be selected with this in mind. A regular (3 monthly?) debrief meeting could be called to keep the pastoral team in touch with each other and give them a

clear identity in their work. They would also be formally recognised by the church meeting and through some kind of commissioning service.

- 9.14.7 This pastoral care could also be linked in to following up newcomers who attend church. When people attend for the first time, perhaps with their children, a great deal of care and sensitivity needs to be shown in how they are greeted and followed up. The 5th mission issue states **“Develop and train a welcome team to improve greeting at the door”**. This ministry is of paramount importance as sensitive greeting at the door is not just a practical exercise in handing out literature or showing newcomers to a seat, but also has a strongly pastoral element in being sensitive to how a newcomer feels when they enter church for the first time. Are they apprehensive? Is this the first time they have been to church ever or in a long time? Will they be aware of what to do? Will they have concerns about where the toilets are or how long the service will last? Do they have some underlying concern that has brought them to church today or are they wanting to just anonymously find out more? All these require a greeter to offer warmth and welcome but not to overdo it so that the newcomer feels smothered. Thus the consultant suggests that recruitment and training of a welcome team be followed through as soon as possible.
- 9.14.8 Whilst Dawlish URC receives a number of “visitors” on holiday, there is a need to attract those in the local community who will become a part of the church on a permanent basis. Recent research has shown that follow up of first time visitors in the first 2 days after coming bears greater fruit than a longer time before people are followed up. This can be done with an initial phone call or a simple letter, and perhaps with a visit or bunch of flowers to thank them for coming along and to offer to answer any questions about the church which may have arisen from their visit – anything they did not understand or any service the church can offer to them.
- 9.14.9 Such visiting needs to be tied in with a developed pastoral care scheme. It is suggested that alongside those responsible for pastoral visiting of those already on the church family list that people be assigned the specific task of follow up of newcomers. Some of these might well be some of the same people who greet people at the door. Newcomers could then be placed on a temporary visiting list until, hopefully, they become more integrated into the life of the church and can naturally become part of another more permanent list. By including people in this way we are able to make them feel as though they belong before they even believe. The trend has been in the past to assume that people must believe before they belong, but in current times the tendency is that they belong first and then take time to consider the claims of faith

before a commitment is made. This is one of the bases of the Alpha Course where believing takes time and people are given space to consider faith before commitment comes.

9.15 DEVELOPING THE PREMISES TO SUPPORT MISSION

- 9.15.1 The premises of Dawlish URC present a fairly closed impression from the outside but once inside there is a sense of space and airiness. However it is also recognised that the design of the church gives the impression of tradition and maybe belonging to a past age. The comments below begin to address the negative aspects of this comment. Having said this, the church sanctuary is well cared for and beautifully adorned with banners created by the Banner Group – a group which now sadly no longer meets in this form. The imagination and creativity behind the wall hangings are to be commended and the store of banners (more than can now be stored – the reason why the group closed) provides a variation in theme throughout the year. The prayer corner also offers a small imaginative area for quiet prayer. This could well be better enhanced and used by people who simply stroll into church when it is open and who wish to offer prayer privately and anonymously.
- 9.15.2 The 3rd mission issue at 6.2.3 states **“Develop the buildings to best support the mission objectives of the church”**. One of the original motivations for the invitation of the Evangelism Enabler was an ongoing plan to develop the current buildings so that they would become more suitable for use for mission in today’s world. Thus this mission issue appears high on the prioritised agenda, but encouragingly does not appear at the top, this position being taken by issues to do with deepening spiritual life and raising the profile. It is these higher prioritised issues which will form a spiritual and practical foundation for other things, including the development of the premises. Having said this, the time is now right for the building issues to be resolved.
- 9.15.3 The church has made a number of decisions in recent months and years, and at times it appears much has been said and little has been done! This is often the nature of making major decisions about buildings as there needs to be consensus about the form of the changes as well as being realistic about what can be afforded. In addition sometimes premises have to be sold and all this can take time. It appears that agreement has now been reached by the church to sell the Hamilton Halls and whilst these have served the church well over the years and still provide a large amount of accommodation for various activities, the necessary adaptations needed to come into line with 21st century needs as well as serious problems with access for the disabled, are too numerous to be economically viable. In addition, having a development of the current building which will offer similar

provision as well as updating the premises to make it more appealing to newcomers is a wise and helpful way forward.

- 9.15.4 The consultant took time to look around the premises and has a few comments to make about church buildings generally and some areas specifically. However the overall reflection is that the current plans to sell the Hamilton Halls and get on with a major development of the existing church building should be pursued without delay. It is good to know that this is already happening and that meetings are planned to progress this in the near future.
- 9.15.5 The question about buildings which has to be asked is "What do they exist for?" Are they simply to serve the in-house purposes of those who regularly use them? Are they attractive to outsiders and give the impression that the church is "in tune" with modern life? Are they welcoming and warm? Are they well maintained? Are they still practical for the uses to which they are put? Do they serve the needs of the community if they are to be released and used in this way? It is important to remember that the church is clearly not the buildings but the people who make up the church. The place of meeting is of secondary importance to the fact that the church *is* meeting and is growing – in faith, love, spirituality and numbers.
- 9.15.6 We need to compete with the market place in the way we present ourselves so that the church is noticed and a higher profile is seen. Again external decoration and renovation may be in order to ensure the buildings are seen as loved by those who use them. Buildings that are cared for says something about the way in which the church also cares for its people. Internally, different lighting schemes can help to change the character of a building, perhaps using a mixture of indirect lighting and spotlights to pick out important areas and focus the eye. This coupled with fresh internal decoration can make a building warm and welcoming. In addition, banners and other more temporary displays can help transform a building generally, and particularly for those special occasions when guests are invited along.
- 9.15.7 The best way of learning more about this area of refreshing the building is to do a survey of other local public premises. For example, look at local pubs, cafes, theatres, shops, civic centres, leisure centres etc. As the survey is taken, a critical eye is needed to decide what message the buildings give to you as you enter. Are they warm and inviting; cold and austere; modern and fresh; light and airy etc? In this way ideas can be gained as to what might be done to transform what the church already has. However, this route should not be seen as an easy way out of the more fundamental challenges which may be a better way to focus the church's attention in the future.

- 9.15.8 With these comments in mind it seems clear to the consultant that the plans contained in the "Wish List" of Dawlish URC at Appendix F go a long way to satisfying these criterion. However there are just a few additional comments to make.
- 9.15.9 To ensure the church premises are warm and inviting to those who do not normally cross the threshold it is important that the entrance is made more open and accessible – not just physically but psychologically. At present the front doors look shut up and unused the majority of the time. Because of the use of large wooden doors there is no sense of the church being open. It is suggested that consideration be given to replacing the doors with toughened glass and remodelling the whole entrance porch to the premises. There is room to develop a light and airy entrance lobby with good lighting which would offer a much more appealing presentation to the outside world.
- 9.15.10 The consultant is aware that alternative disabled access is under consideration. In such a building it is difficult to offer the ideal of a ramp near to or as part of the entrance for able bodied people, but if some way of achieving this could be found it would be preferable. Could it be practical to construct a ramp in a zig-zag across the front of the building where the garden seats are currently provided? If not, access may have to be made elsewhere in the building.
- 9.15.11 It is strongly advised that consideration be given to the lighting of the whole premises. It is noted that in the wish list, reference is made to the installation of overhead flood lights. Lighting can make or break the appearance of a building. Indirect lighting in a large sanctuary such as Dawlish URCs can provide a warm atmosphere and create mood in a way that harsh direct lighting cannot. Direct lighting will usually have the effect of flattening the appearance of a room. However this might be supplemented with more direct spot lighting for certain areas, especially the platform/chancel area or perhaps to highlight windows, banners, the prayer area etc. The use of sunken halogen spotlights in the foyer and coffee/meeting area under the gallery can similarly create a warm and modern atmosphere. Low power versions of these lights are now available and can offer a similar effect. In general it is important that lighting is not carried out piecemeal and that sufficient funding is available to make a good job of this so that the attractive interior can be enhanced.
- 9.15.12 The exterior notice board is one area which cannot receive any encouraging remarks! This whole issue is included in the second mission issue: **"Develop better publicity and distribution of leaflets, and improve the notice board and entrance doors and area."** There are two notice boards to either side of the main entrance and both look old,

tired, un-maintained and dreary. They do nothing to encourage passers by to take a second look other than to perhaps give the impression of a church which is not used – this is despite the fact that there are up to date notices on them. It is strongly suggested that the notice boards are replaced as a matter of urgency with larger, cleaner and more attractive boards. One could contain regular meeting information perhaps using laminated posters created on a computer or professionally printed, so that if new meetings come into being there is not great expense in renewing the information. The other might contain message posters that offer a thought or encouraging word to passers by. It is perhaps worth considering consolidating the 2 boards into one larger board, or creating a large board central to the frontage to identify the church with a second smaller board with more details. Imagination can be used to create a much better impression to the passing public and perhaps the creative skills of those who designed banners might be brought into use here to help re-design the outside area. Above all the notice boards should look alive to reflect an alive congregation.

9.16 PROFILE AND PUBLICITY

- 9.16.1 It has become clear through some of the above and the consultant's observations, that the profile of the church needs to be raised. This is part of the thrust behind the second mission issue. It has a good location but more could be done to ensure people are aware of the church's presence and its activities, especially when there is a special event being held. This has been touched on in the remarks above concerning the entrance area, but in this section there is a need to deal with contact in other ways with the community.
- 9.16.2 Part of the need is for the church to communicate itself effectively and positively to the surrounding community. There is a need to generate a good feeling about the church so that when people have some kind of contact with it, they are already aware that it is a church with a reputation for being warm, friendly, welcoming and caring. Such a reputation will mainly be generated by the kind of church it is, the activities it runs, the ways it serves the community and above all by the kind of people within it. However, whilst the church can often be quite good at all these things, there is a tendency for shyness and an unwillingness to "blow our own trumpet"! Yet as soon as there is a problem in the church you can be sure that the local press will make much of the negativity raised. We therefore need to find ways of publicising ourselves more effectively. Regular literature distribution in the form of attractively designed leaflets will raise the profile over a period of time. It may not be that people are immediately attracted to the church, but if they receive a leaflet at Harvest, Christmas and Easter, they will

be aware the church exists and may in time find a need to come within the doors.

- 9.16.3 One church in the consultant's experience produced a regular A4 4 page "Community News" 3 times a year. This newspaper style publication had details of church events, a very short article from the minister and also commissioned articles from local community groups such as neighbourhood watch, clubs that use the church premises and many others. There was often a "personal story" by way of testimony of how God had touched the life of one of the members. The sheet also carried advertising from local businesses which partly paid for its production. This perhaps more than any other activity raised the profile of the church and also generated a sense of community on an estate where few people knew what was going on. It was well received widely amongst the community and was a most worthwhile project even if it did take a great deal of time and commitment by a few people. In a small town the size of Dawlish there would be immense potential for such a project and the drip feed nature of such a publication could generate goodwill towards the church.
- 9.16.4 It is therefore suggested that a small working group be formed to find and implement new ways of publicising the church and its events. It may be helpful to take professional advice on this issue and the Evangelism Enabler can offer some input in this area as well as contacts with people who can give training.
- 9.16.5 The internet is a modern form of communication used by many yet often under utilised by churches. Upon a web search, the consultant could not find a church web page for Dawlish URC. The church is encouraged to take steps to creating and maintaining a web page to bring yet a further presence. This can be done commercially and if a church member has the expertise, can be an ongoing project at relatively little cost. The consultant can advise in this area if required.
- 9.17 In the above reflections there has been attempt to cover most of the mission issues raised at the consultation weekend, but it will be recognised that not every point has been covered in detail. However most will have been covered in some way or other, sometimes by comments made in another context. It is important therefore for Dawlish URC, in consideration of the comments, to also review the mission issues and consider whether the order to them given at the consultation weekend is still appropriate and whether further reflection is needed on some that have been neglected by the consultant.

9.18 SUMMARY

It is always dangerous to summarise the points made as there is a temptation in such a lengthy document to skip over the detail and “cut to the chase”. Can I urge you not to do this but to simply use this list of summarised recommendations for action as a convenient way to refer back to the main text. The list that follows is simply an extract of points and recommendations made with their section numbers for cross referencing purposes. They are suggestions only – the consultant has no authority to tell the church what to do – and are not a “magic formula” for success. It is up to the church to consider each point and others raised from the main text and, with God’s guidance, determine what should be done when and how.

General

- Sec 5.3.3 and 9.13.7 Possibly focus on older population as initial target group
- Sec 5.5.6 Make the most of existing opportunities and encourage further steps towards faith
- Sec 5.5.6 Explore a monthly outdoor service in the summer
- Sec 5.9.2 Conduct a TRIO or ACT programme to encourage more consistent and increased giving
- Sec 5.9.3 Consider increased and proportionate giving away to mission

Vision

- Sec 9.12.5 Re-focus on the church mission statement with a series of sermons over several months
- 9.12.7 Find a more succinct slogan to sum up the church’s mission purpose

Prayer

- Sec 9.12.13 Encourage corporate prayer through small groups

Small Groups

- Sec 9.12.18 Prioritise forming small groups using preaching series on mission statement as basis for study, and also The Emmaus Course
- Sec 9.12.22 Make use of small groups as an evangelistic opportunity

Evangelism and strategy

- Sec 9.13.8 Formulate a long term strategy for evangelism

- Sec 9.13.9 Offer a parenting course to parents and toddlers and others
- Sec 9.13.10 Invite the Evangelism Enabling Team to run a course on personal evangelism, possibly co-operating with other URCs in the area
- Sec 9.13.11 Examine ways in which the culture gap can be bridged

Pastoral care

- Sec 9.14.5 Review the current pastoral care arrangements to develop the team
- Sec 9.14.5 Find ways in which pastoral care can become an evangelistic tool
- Sec 9.14.6 Appoint a pastoral care co-ordinator
- Sec 9.14.7 Recruit and train a welcoming team with pastoral skills uppermost in the job specification
- Sec 9.14.9 Appoint pastoral carers specifically responsible for newcomers

Buildings

- Sec 9.15.4 Pursue the sale of Hamilton Halls and the development of the rest of the building without delay
- Sec 9.15.8 Make use of the existing Wish List of building requirements
- Sec 9.15.9 Remodel the entrance doors and area
- Sec 9.15.10 Investigate the practicalities of providing disabled friendly access
- Sec 9.15.11 Give serious consideration to the lighting of the premises
- Sec 9.15.12 Replace the two notice boards with more modern boards and consider redesigning the exterior signage and area
- Sec 9.16.4 For a publicity working group to implement better publicity for the church and its events
- Sec 9.16.5 Create and maintain a website presence on the internet

Final Comments

The visit to and work with Dawlish URC was a rewarding time for the consultant. The people he met with seemed in good heart and despite the weaknesses they identified of being an ageing congregation and lacking in resources, he discovered a group of people with vision and determination to move forward. Whilst all churches will have a large number of people who do little more than attend on Sundays (and this is true of Dawlish URC) there is also a strong and enthusiastic core of people who have a great deal of motivation and possess many gifts which can be utilised to enlarge the Kingdom of God and to grow the church. The church should be encouraged by what they are already doing and be prepared to take further steps of faith. There are many hurdles to be jumped and there is an immense challenge in the redevelopment of the premises, but the opportunities afforded by the potential here should not be underestimated. Immediately there is the challenge of losing their minister, but instead of simply waiting around for the next one to appear, the church needs to move forward and establish direction, vision and a strategy for the future which any future minister can then take on board and “run with” in their service to the church in Dawlish.

This report attempts to offer many ways forward – some of them are basic and deal with the spiritual life of the church. Others are more practical and may require resources which are currently not present. But with God all things are possible – all He requires is a people willing to discover and to do His will, submitted to His Lordship and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“The angel replied... ‘For nothing is impossible with God.’

³⁸*Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord’s servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true.’”*

Luke 1: 37b-38 – New Living Translation

10. A PROCESS FOR CREATING NEW STRATEGIES

The scope of the consultancy had been worked out by the church with the consultant on a previous occasion. It is:

The South Western Evangelism Enabling Team shall help Dawlish URC to grow by:

- **Discerning God's call and discovering a common vision for the future**
- **Encouraging the members to discover their potential and possibilities to enrich church life and witness within the community**
- **Deepening and developing a feeling of belonging which is inclusive of all who come through our doors**
- **Discovering the best use and development of the church premises in order to reach out to the community**

The previous section has helped to clarify the mission issues discovered in the consultation and to highlight areas of potential development with some suggestions to follow through. However one of the most difficult parts of this exercise is going to be "how" do we do it? It is all too easy for a church to focus on issues in such a way that it goes round in circles. The following process is designed to prevent this and move the church on. It can not be stressed too much that this is a process that will take time. It is not a "quick fix". The temptation to begin programmes of action before engaging in the reflection that the first steps require should be resisted. It also needs to be said the first steps must begin without delay! The motivation inspired by the consultation needs to be employed so that no momentum is lost. Each step will help the church clarify its mission and take it further forward. As each step is considered, the mission issues addressed in this report need to be borne in mind. The critical mission issues will need to be especially borne in mind when the church reflects its overall objectives. Every step is critical to the process and should not be passed over.

Let us rehearse each step in turn.

- 10.1 First of all we evaluate the situation. We begin with where we are. If we are to be as objective as we possibly can be, we must first assemble as much information as we can that relates to our task. In seeking to determine the mission of the church we look at the community in which we exercise our witness and we look at the church of which we are a part. We identify the mission issues. Some of the factors dismay us. We cannot ignore them but we need not be overwhelmed by them. Most problems can be turned into opportunities. We carefully identify our strengths because these are important building blocks to create a new future. So we ask the question: "Where are we now?" The data and issues previously explored in this report provide us with many of the answers.
- 10.2 Secondly, we recognise our values. Ordinarily we might give little attention to our values but in fact they are amongst the most influential factors in the church's mission. History, tradition, churchmanship, theological accents, our upbringing and our personal needs and aspirations shape the beliefs and values of a congregation. One hopes that our love of God and our love for each other find the highest place in

our hierarchy of values. The larger church is likely to regard the importance of "task" highly. In the small church there is usually a stronger emphasis on "people". Each might learn from the other as we seek to strike the right balance.

In every congregation there are different points of view. We are not setting out to determine the differences but to discover which values we have in common. "What are the core values on which we have a common mind?" Some answers to this question have already been given through the consultation and in the report and although a large number attended the consultation, it should be ensured that the whole congregation has been represented in the responses with efforts taken to establish the opinion of people who did not attend. **The answers to this question need to be collated before any other steps are taken.**

- 10.3 Thirdly, we pray for vision. Vision illuminates the future. It is a picture of where we are intended to be. In the dispensation of the Spirit the young see visions and the old dream dreams. Without vision we perish. However vision cannot be simply manufactured or called up at will. It is a given thing. The reading of the Scriptures and prayer, in the context of the issues exposed in the consultation, can create a seedbed for vision. The imagination can be provoked by inviting church members to shut their eyes and imagine what their church will be like in ten year's time. We may invoke God's Spirit to prompt each one with pictures or ideas. It is an exercise in sanctified imagination that can develop into a new kind of praying. As thoughts are shared fresh perspectives are gained. These "visions and dreams" should be written down and then evaluated by the consensus of the members. There is everything to be gained by asking: "What is the Spirit saying to the Church?" Again, a specially conceived service or church meeting might be a time to "wait on God". A service is also an appropriate time to share the visions and dreams.
- 10.4 Fourthly, we state our purpose. Out of the vision and dreams we need to state clearly and carefully why we are here. The question posed to businesses by John Harvey Jones may well be applied in every church: "What business are you in today?" A series of sermons together with a common theme for house-groups may assist a congregation to think through relevant Bible passages. We will need to write down our purpose.

That will enable us to hone the words so that we say exactly what we mean to say.

The "mission statement" may be divided into three sections:

- 10.4.1 Our Values (a brief statement that owns the key, core values of the congregation.
- 10.4.2 Our Purpose (a succinct one sentence statement of what the church is for); and
- 10.4.3 Our Objectives (these overall objectives of the church apply to the church's primary vocation with regard to worship, preaching,

teaching, healing, evangelism, community service, social action, pastoral care nurture, discipleship, fellowship, etc).

It is useful to display the statement in the church as a reminder as to what we are about. From time to time the statement needs to be reconsidered. "Why are we here?" Does our mission statement precisely express our intentions? Can we improve it? Are we doing what we intend to do? Are we being faithful to the vision God has given?"

- 10.5 Fifthly, we set our goals. These can be separated into long, medium and short-term goals. Long-term goals relate to the overall objectives of the church, which have been spelt out in the mission statement. Medium term goals determine a stage on that journey in say three to five years. Short-term goals relate to the year ahead. For example, the church may perceive one of its long-term goals as moving to a Purpose Driven Church style of operation. Its medium term goal may be to encourage new house-groups to form and existing groups to become more focussed on outreach and to become more than simply bible studies. A short-term goal might be to establish a working party to identify the need and formulate the plans, perhaps including attendance at a suitable conference to glean information and training.

10.5.1 The goals we set can be evaluated by the following criteria:

10.5.1.1 They are *relevant*. They are based on careful research and are basic to the main purpose. They crystallise that purpose so that the church does not lose its sense of direction.

10.5.1.2 They are *measurable*. If at all possible goals need to be quantified and put in a time reference.

10.5.1.3 They are *achievable*. There is a reasonable hope that the church will accomplish what it sets out to do.

10.5.1.4 They are *significant*. They will produce a change for the better.

10.5.1.5 They are *shared*. The goals are not the private dream of the minister or any other leader but are shared and owned by the congregation.

- 10.6 Next we establish priorities. In determining our church's priorities we need to recognise that God has his own economy and he is at work in many ways. We need to ask: "Where do we fit into that economy? We cannot serve everyone. What are other churches doing? To which groups will we particularly minister? Are there any people groups that are particularly receptive? We cannot do everything. Which things are vital? We cannot be everything to everyone. Which role is most important?"

Needs change so we will need to re-evaluate priorities after a while. In determining priorities the ultimate question is not what is urgent but what is most important. We need to be vigilant - the urgent has a way of supplanting the important! For the Christian, priorities must always be assessed in the light of the greatest commandments. A hierarchy of goals will need to be established. A church moves on as it deals with priorities. Research in the USA has demonstrated that growing churches focus on one *primary* task at a time and only when they have completed that do they move on to the next.

- 10.7 Then we can make our plans. It is at this stage that the mission statement and setting of goals will begin to shape a Mission Action Plan as practical actions are formulated to achieve those goals. Time given to planning can prevent a great deal of heartache caused by initiating a programme without thought. Because planning takes time it should be done as far in advance as is possible. The following question will need to be answered: "What is the programme? Is there an alternative course of action? What are the constraints? What resources in terms of people, and money and premises are available and can be employed? What is the time schedule? How do we inform people and encourage them to participate?" The plans we write down are a statement about changing our future.
- 10.8 Eighthly, we take action. The moment arrives when we implement our plans: a programme or course of action. Its nature inevitably depends on what it is we are trying to achieve. Given the issues we have considered, it might be introducing the "Purpose Driven Church" concept, changing the structure or introducing new times and days of worship, employing and using a family and children's worker, developing a new house-groups network, providing relevant activities for young parents or young adults without children, or whatever.
- 10.9 Next we evaluate and alter. As a programme develops, changes will be necessary. Plans do not always work out as we intended. These changes need to be made with care and in the light of our purpose and goals.
- 10.10 The tenth and last step is an assessment of the whole process as it relates to the task or programme we have pursued. "Have we been faithful to the vision? Have we been true to our values? Have we fulfilled our purpose? Have we achieved our goal?" When we have made that assessment then we can make our plans with regard to other tasks or programmes in the light of our experience.

The strategy described above is a way of living and acting that is relevant to the whole church. Once the church has determined its mission statement and primary goals, each group in the church might follow the same course, asking how its mission and its goals correlate with the mission and goals of the church as a whole. The process can be used to think through new courses of action of programmes that the church initiates. This is a means of creating a church which is united in its purpose; a church in which every organisation and every member pulls in the same direction.

What applies to the church community applies to our personal pilgrimage. All of us can gain from asking ourselves: "What is my mission in life? Does it express my dreams? What are my goals? What are my priorities?"

Some of the steps need to be taken with the congregation as a whole, such as exploring values and sharing vision. Planning, of course, is best done in a small working party. Whatever is done in the small group needs to be shared with the whole body so that each step can be owned by everyone who is making the journey.

It cannot be said too strongly that each step is significant and important in the process. The lessons of experience are that if a church misses out a step it is likely to regret it afterwards. As this is a process of development it is difficult to retrace the journey and include at a later date those steps which should have been taken earlier. There are rewards for those who work patiently through the steps.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Results of SWOT Exercise Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Numbers after indicate ticks added on day of consultation
Additional comments added on day are in italics

STRENGTHS	
Fellowship	16
Friendliness	16
Welcome	16
Care	15
Geographical location – use of building	14

WEAKNESSES	
Lack of numbers	15
Elderly congregation	13
Hamilton Hall – location, separation from church, financial burden	9
Lack of energy	8

OPPORTUNITIES	
Geographical location to exploit	18
Redevelopment of church site – for church & community	17
People retire here	15
Our small groups	11
<i>Widowed</i>	

THREATS	
Diminishing numbers	19
Financial worry	14
Apathy	10
Secular competition	4
Competition from other churches	1
<i>Some clash of personalities</i>	

Appendix B

Causes of Decline

23 sheets returned

Dawlish URC	Very serious problem	Major problem	Minor Problem	No Problem
1. Maintenance Complex	3	9	11	0
2. Failure Syndrome	3	12	8	0
3. Nominality	0	11	10	2
4. Fellowshipitis	0	3	8	12
5. Cultural blindness	3	9	8	3
6. Premises Paralysis	4	11	7	1
7. Leadership Tensions	3	8	11	1

Appendix C

Signs of Growth

23 sheets returned with one blank box

Dawlish URC	Very Strong	Strong	Weak	Very Weak
1. Living Spirituality	1	10	10	2
2. Effective Leadership	2	15	6	0
3. Empowered Discipleship	0	10	13	0
4. Specified and Owned Vision	0	8	13	2
5. Engaging Worship	1	8	13	1
6. Agapistic Relationships	0	12	11	0
7. Focussed Evangelism	0	5	15	2
8. Community Engagement	0	9	14	0
9. Openness to Change	0	11	12	0

Appendix D

Community, Church and Mission Issues produced by groups

Church issues produced by groups

- Nearly half over 75
- Membership going down every year
- Doing/activity based groups seem to attract more
- Recently started groups doing better than long running ones
- Expenditure more than income
- Church membership highest in 1976 slowly decreasing to 57 in 2005 (large intake from another church)
- Adult church attendance is halved from 1996-2005
- No children or young people
- Largest percentage of congregation is 75+
- Two times number of females
- Small amount of time spent in bible study and prayer meetings
- 5-15s few in the church
- Delegation
- 45% over 75
- Many activity groups
- Extensive use of buildings by other churches and groups
- No men's meeting
- It is friendly and welcoming
- Holiday visitors always come back
- No youth activities
- Active in Churches Together
- More people to Keep Fit
- Closer than any other
- We don't do any door to door visiting
- In Keep Fit and Parents and toddlers, fellowship is high and evangelistic orientation is poor
- Declining membership
- 45% congregation over 74
- Other churches in area

Community issues produced by groups

- Lone pensioners higher in Dawlish v England and Wales
- High number of widows
- Active working age group more than we thought – 45% from 25-64 yrs
- Nearly double in communal residential establishments v England and Wales
- Nearly double employment in health and social work v England and Wales
- 40.6% own homes very high distinction between Dawlish and Devon
- Lone male parents unemployed in Dawlish
- More retired so economically inactive
- Not much manufacturing
- More hotels and restaurants
- More social work
- Not so many higher occupations
- More part time workers
- Less people travel to work on coach etc.
- Higher number of people own outright their homes
- Higher number own a whole house
- High number of people in flats
- Higher number of people in residential or nursing homes
- Higher number of one person pensioners in own homes – and married pensioners
- Fewer children
- Age 45 upwards – more than national average
- High white British Christians
- 45-75 age group much higher than England and Wales
- Single parents female 93%
- Those living in residential homes much higher than national average – double
- Health and social workers double national average
- Long term illness much higher than national average – 24% v 19%
- 75+ age group much higher in Dawlish
- Average age of Dawlish is 46
- 30-59 age group is larger in Dawlish (empty nesters)
- 76.9% state that they are Christian – do not all go to church
- Fewer other religions in Dawlish

- More owner occupiers and more own outright
- More than average living in private rented homes
- More people living in residential and nursing homes than average
- 1 person living alone high- pensioner

All Mission Issues produced by groups

Group 1

- Should the church, we target empty nesters
- To be aware of the needs of residential/nursing homes
- Should do we attract children and young people –competition from secular entertainment on Sunday
- Where are 76.9% “Christian” people (weekday meetings??)
- Pastoral care – infrequency of visits
- How do we reach out to lonely people

Group 2

- Loneliness? – do we have a mission to the elderly?
- Paying more attention to residential homes
- Doing/activity groups
- Publicity
- Support for young people

Group 3

- Reach out to parents and toddlers
- Keep fit
- Some transport difficulties
- Need to attract young people
- Higher than average people stating they are Christians – where are they?
- Other churches attendances also down on the whole

Group 4

- Building modifications
- Residential home opportunities
- Single parents?
- Youth/Pilots

- Publicity – notice board and distribution of leaflets
- Greeting at the door

Mission Issues – Final grouping with scores

- A. (2) Should the church target empty nesters? (44-59s)**
- B. (7) Develop Pastoral care as an evangelistic opportunity – offering care and friendship to elderly and lonely people**
- C. (1) Take opportunity to develop contacts with residential and nursing homes**
- D. (9) Develop more activity groups meeting on church premises as an opportunity to offer friendship and share the love of Jesus**
- E. (5) Find ways of reaching out to and bridging the gap with the parents and toddlers group**
- F. (4) Create a transport scheme to enable those who need it to attend church activities**
- G. (2) Take time to discern the rightness or otherwise of developing ministry to young people**
- H. (7) Develop midweek activity (Alpha?) or alternative worship opportunity to try and attract “Christian” non attenders**
- I. (11) Develop the buildings to best support the mission objectives of the church**
- J. (1) Investigate ways of supporting single parents in Dawlish**
- K. (11) Develop better publicity and distribution of leaflets, and improve the notice board and entrance doors and area**
- L. (7) Develop and train a welcome team to improve greeting at the door**
- M. (11) Deepen the spiritual life of the church through the development of house groups/prayer groups etc.**

Appendix E

Congregational Values

The following lists are those of 4 small groups. The results and scoring is shown in section 8 of the report

E.1.1	SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS	10
E.1.2	RELEVANT PREACHING	9
E.1.3	MEANINGFUL WORSHIP	8
E.1.4	CLEAR DOCTRINES	7
E.1.5	PRAYERFULNESS	6
E.1.6	WARM FELLOWSHIP	5
E.1.7	SPIRITUAL GROWTH	4
E.1.8	EVANGELICAL SPIRIT	3
E.1.9	COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY	2
E.1.10	PASSION FOR JUSTICE	1

E.2.1	MEANINGFUL WORSHIP	10
E.2.2	RELEVANT PREACHING	9
E.2.3	PRAYERFULNESS	8
E.2.4	SPIRITUAL GROWTH	7
E.2.5	Personal Integrity	6
E.2.6	EVERY PERSON MINISTRY	5
E.2.7	COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY	4
E.2.8	SOCIAL AWARENESS	3
E.2.9	ECUMENICAL EMPHASIS	2
E.2.10	TRADITION	1

E.3.1	WARM FELLOWSHIP	10
E.3.2	MEANINGFUL WORSHIP	9
E.3.3	RELEVANT PREACHING	8
E.3.4	GOOD MUSIC AND SINGING	7
E.3.5	EVANGELICAL SPIRIT	6
E.3.6	EVERY PERSON MINISTRY	5
E.3.7	SOCIAL AWARENESS	4
E.3.8	PRAYERFULNESS	3
E.3.9	SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS	2
E.3.10	VIBRANT YOUTH WORK	1

E.4.1	MEANINGFUL WORSHIP	10
E.4.2	SPIRITUAL GROWTH	9
E.4.3	PRAYERFULNESS	8
E.4.4	EVANGELICAL SPIRIT	7
E.4.5	WARM FELLOWSHIP	6
E.4.6	GOOD MUSIC AND SINGING	5
E.4.7	ECUMENICAL EMPHASIS	4
E.4.8	SOCIAL AWARENESS	3
E.4.9	PEACE	2
E.4.10	PASSION FOR JUSTICE	1

Appendix F

Wish List for building development

Produced by local church at a previous meeting

Ideas of Work Already Discussed.

- Renew roof.
- Make asbestos list
- Arrange for gas, electricity and water mains to be installed in the Church
- Replace electric wiring in Church - decision to be taken on overhead flood lights.
- Renew audio system
- Remove Foyer screen north into the Church as far as the first window edge and advance Gallery front same distance - check need for Gallery support - make good gallery floor and insert staircase from new Gallery front to Foyer floor.- use space beneath the staircase as storage space - check fire precautions/regulations
- Provide three toilets at east side of Foyer- male, female, and disabled - disabled to be fitted with alarm - also to contain baby-changing facilities. these to be sited in place of present tea bar arrangement
- Make new Kitchen in alcove on south side of Foyer - decide requirements and check cost.
- Replace heating system - decide which system - fan assisted or other - arrange sale of radiators to refurbishers - and the cast iron piping for scrap.
- Arrange to sell pews - replace with comfortable stacking chairs decide on Church floor finish - main body of Church becomes a multi purpose space.
- Remove Pulpit and make good Chancel steps - Chancel to be kept as 'sacred' space - if removal of pulpit refused - suggest a smaller wooden pulpit **near window by Vestry door.**
- Check Organ value - if agreed arrange sale - check cost of replacing wall in Chancel . refurbish organ loft as useful room for Church Office/small meetings.
- Consider division of Gallery into rooms. (inc toilet)
- Fit doorbell with loud alarm –
- Repaint Church interior
- Storage

All the above will need to be costed by Jason Sandland in order to decide (a) what can be afforded and (b) to apply for the 10% grant from Synod, (important as we will probably only get one bite of the cherry !!)