

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This week the parish council have published the Mission Action Plan for 2022. This plan is called Stage 3, Part 2. Hopefully this will be the final part of the plan which when achieved will mean that a new era of vision setting and mission planning can begin. Although I will not be seeing this final stage with you, I feel confident that you are well equipped to undertake this exciting venture. I remember when we started out on the mission planning work some years ago that we were unsure where the process would lead us. We tried things that didn't always work, but rather than giving up, we tried something else. Now we are certain that God has given us a calling and a direction, and we are boldly stepping out in faith.

We can see around us and experience the positive effects of our church having a Mission Action Plan. Apart from the enormous visual transformation in the outside area created by the community garden, which is beautiful, there is a genuine experience of community in the space, especially in the garden and op shop, with a flow on effect in the church building itself. St Luke's precinct is a place to come and be and to belong. I sense a drawing together of the people of St Luke's with those who come from beyond the congregations, a real feeling of goodwill that is in a process of evolving into what I perceive is a new vision of church. There is energy here that is sadly missing in many church communities. Age is no barrier to activity at St Luke's. Our flourishing into our vision has everything to do with the faith to believe that God is leading us, and that God wants this for us. This is a testimony to the strength of the faith of those who have driven this plan.

All that we have achieved to date, by God's grace, has been despite the huge challenges of the pandemic, the restrictions it has caused, the financial implications, the heightened sense of fear, anxiety and stress – which sometimes bubbles over in our community – in addition to the fact that the building up of our project has been damn hard work, physically and mentally. People of St Luke's,

you should step back and take a moment to look, reflect and celebrate what has been done. Rejoice in the Holy Spirit who has sustained you and who will guide you onward.

Stage 3 Part 2 of St Luke's Mission Action Plan involves entering more fully into the goal of meal support for people needing assistance. Difficulty in having enough food is a shameful crisis in a developed country such as Australia. However, as the facts from organisations like Foodbank show, food shortage is real for too many people in Australia.

As I said at the Christmas Mission Action Plan celebration, our original plans to fully enclose the undercroft area as a community resource require us to establish the ministry first before building anything. Once we can show there is a need, then we will have a good chance at funding. If we try and build first and find the ministry after, funding will be impossible to get, and the project become most likely to fail. And so, we will start small and build up, looking always to God to open doors, to speak quiet answers to our prayers.

The partnership we are beginning with Foodbank provides a base from which to develop St Luke's food ministry. In 2022 the goal of our Mission Action Plan is to provide a simple meal alongside the mobile Foodbank visit once a fortnight. This may just start with a sausage sizzle for the people who come to access food. It may develop into a sandwich or soup, a hot bowl of slow cook or piece of lasagne. When we can establish that people are accepting this ministry and seeking relief, then we can apply for grant funding. We would start with funding for something smaller, an enclosed area with mini kitchen and serving hatch. We might put out chairs and tables. What happens after that is for the next era of mission planning which you will undertake at the right time.

The passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians on one body with many members speaks into the success we have had to date. Every member is valuable.

Every member of the body of Christ has a place in the work of our mission planning, from the person who struck the first spade into the ground in the garden to the person who gave a bag of food from the op shop to a person in need, from the one who made someone a cup of coffee to the one who comes in and faithfully weeds and waters. The one who cleans, the one who administers, makes up plans, cooks a barbecue, sorts out stock, buys supplies, makes phone calls and sends emails, sits and has morning tea together, encourages another, prays for the project – all these are members of the body of Christ, and not one member is more important than another.

Some say that they have nothing to offer or that they can't contribute to the work of the church. I say that everyone can do something. Everyone can pray for the work. Everyone can give a word of encouragement, be interested, be positive in the face of what otherwise would seem inevitable decline in the church in this decade of the twenty-first century. Not everyone is called to put a spade into the soil or speak to a homeless person. Not everyone is called to sit quietly and pray or read the holy scriptures seeking affirmation. But everyone is called to something.

Our Mission Action Plan is bearing fruit because the members of the body of Christ in this church have a vision for the building of community and this vision lines up with the needs of the community and we pray constantly that it is the will of God. Our vision for a community of faith is based in the scripture Jesus read in the synagogue: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

This passage comes from the sixty-first chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus chose these words when he came to Nazareth because they highlight who he is and who he has come to save. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your

hearing,” Jesus announces to those in the synagogue, predicting his own mission to the poor, the outcast and the suffering. At first the people would praise him, but as we will learn next week, as Jesus more fully interprets the meaning of his mission they would be filled with rage and drive him out, intending to kill him.

Jesus’ mission to the poor, the outcast and the suffering is also our mission. All mission comes from God and must return to God through the body of Christ of which we are all indispensable members. The good news is waiting to be heard by those who need to hear it. The good news is always ready to be heard. By word and action, we are the instruments of God’s mission. God sent Jesus into the world, armed with the Holy Spirit to be good news and to live as the Word made flesh among us. We are his body, sometimes misshapen and not fully functional, but a body, nonetheless. Let us use our corporate gifts in the body to serve the mission of God in this place.

Let us pray. Holy God, we ask your strength and guidance as we move forward in the work of our Mission Action Plan and in the fulfilling of our vision for the church to which you have called us as your body in Christ. Bless us and sustain us in the journey, guard us from apathy and arrogance, grant to us wisdom and a small share of your grace. Enable us to share the good news with the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, that they and we may know that the Lord’s favour is upon us all. Amen.