



## Synod Reports on vision2020

### 1. Northern Synod

#### Vision 2020 hymn

8:7:8:7:D (written to Abbots Leigh)

We who live by light surrounded  
Blinded in a neon glare -  
News of hatred, greed and squalour  
Drowning signs of love and care -  
Turn to you whose word brings vision  
Seeking 20:20 sight.  
Not denying earth's real darkness,  
Seeing too the gospel light.

Word incarnate bring new vision  
Of a world by love renewed.  
You, who called us into service,  
Give us grace to trust in you.  
Though the storms of change surround us,  
Threat'ning all that we have known,  
Show that here, where saints have laboured,  
Seeds of hope can still be sown.

As we meet in prayer and worship,  
Spirit who renews Christ's church,  
Help us hold the past in honour  
And for fresh expressions search.  
Lead us on to work with others,  
Partners of all creeds and none,  
Sharing work and songs and stories -  
Striving to see justice done

Give us strength to live the Gospel,  
Life that springs from cross and grave;  
Hope that shines through loss and failure  
Knowing Jesu's power to save.  
This age brings new needs and pilgrims  
Make your church a welcome sign  
Sharing healing, challenge, friendship;  
Off'ring all love's bread and wine

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At the October 2010 synod meeting we held a session on vision2020 and shared stories from around the synod under the 10 statements – 2/3 on each. This was inspirational.

This was followed by a consultation process that took place in three forums in Northern Synod. 1) One with the committees and groups of the synod who each had a discussion as to where their work fitted with the vision 2020 framework followed by a meeting of convenors with Mission Executive. 2) One with the children of the synod at an event that John Brown facilitated on this, alongside a bowling trip. 3) The third forum was a questionnaire to each church as to what mission planning they had done or were doing. 26% of responding churches had already used vision2020 by July 2010 as a tool. This was very encouraging.

Mission Executive have since developed a mission plan called 'Dying to Live – vision2020 in Northern Synod' based on the image of John 12:20-26 of the grain of wheat being sown and dying in order for a harvest of abundant life to arise. This has questions or indicators for each of the ten statements for the synod and also explains who will take the lead in the synod for each one.

This was deferred back from the October 2011 synod meeting for various reasons: a lack of urgency in it; not enough focus on reformed identity, and the question of is this simply a paper exercise rather than being about growth now.

'Dying to Live' will hopefully be on the agenda of all synod committees in coming months. There will hopefully be a launch during 2012 when the concerns raised at synod have been heard and dealt with. Including: a) a competition with prizes for a project developing one or more of the statements; b) a gift of sunflower seeds to all local churches to plant to die as

seeds and grow a harvest as a symbol of this; c) a synod celebration in October 2012 to receive stories from around the synod about seed planting and celebrate life and harvest around the URC's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday; d) the synod web site has designated pages for 'Dying to Live – vision2020 in Northern Synod' and worship resources are being gathered from synod folk; e) a DVD using the £1k Mission Committee communication grant will be developed.

*Northern Synod Mission Executive*

## **2. North Western Synod**

In November 2010 North Western Synod decided on a three year strategy which prioritised three of the areas covered by the statements. These are spirituality and prayer, community partnerships and evangelism. The intention behind this was not to mandate local churches to pursue these priorities but simply to determine how the synod will allocate resources at its disposal. Mike Walsh, NW member of the Mission Committee, is our link person with the General Assembly Committee.

However, we realise that simply prioritising the statements does not achieve anything unless it is matched by outcomes. We are currently asking particularly our Learning & Ministries Committee to task our training team according to these priorities. Our activities in the past year have sought to further our engagement with these three in the following ways:

First, Spirituality and Prayer: we are giving more time to bible study at our October synod led by the Revd Dr John Bradbury and a major synod retreat is planned for February 2012. We have an active retreats group which put on a labyrinth at our recent synod day. A number of churches in the South Area have worked together to compile booklets of Lent devotions and Advent devotions which have been widely circulated.

Secondly, Community Partnerships: we have a number of significant community partnerships in the synod from which we are trying to learn. We are currently considering a formal relationship with Bubble Enterprises which is a social company that has been involved in a number of our churches. Their expertise is in social entrepreneurialism.

Thirdly, Evangelism: Our synod has agreed a pattern of special category ministries, one per area, for which we will apply to further the churches' evangelistic endeavours. We are hoping that our forthcoming synod will authorise a new year out scheme for mission interns to come alongside churches and minsters as they engage in community evangelism.

*Richard Church*

## **3. Mersey Synod**

Before our synod meeting in November 2010 all the churches were circulated with a request to identify three key areas of mission in their church life, drawn from the vision2020 priorities, that they would want to focus on for the next three years. The responses were then analysed and the three most identified areas were brought to the November synod for approval as the ones that would be priority areas for the synod to promote.

The November synod identified the following three areas:

1. Prayer and Spirituality
2. Hospitality and Diversity
3. Evangelism and Church Growth

During 2011, the synod produced a leaflet for all our churches entitled "Focus In" to encourage churches to engage with these priorities and offering support in the form of resources and training opportunities. So far, we have completed three training sessions on Hospitality and Diversity with over 100 people representing about 25 - 30 churches and one

training day on Evangelism which attracted about 30 people. Two more Evangelism training days are planned in the new year, led by Andrew Willett and members of our Mission Strategy group.

We have just begun the initial tranche of churches for LMMR (Local Mission and Ministry Review) and the local church pledges are part of the process that the churches will be encouraged to follow. It is very early days yet and we cannot comment on how well that is working.

Vision2020 has given some of our churches, and indeed the synod itself, a focus for their activity in the coming year. Shortly before vision2020 was launched I spoke at a Synod meeting about the church's need to become more "intentional" about mission and vision2020 became a tool in working this out.

A challenge we face, both as a synod and as local churches, is of "initiative overload" and, despite being told all Assembly led initiatives are merely a toolbox from which to select resources, it sometimes doesn't *feel* like that. Another factor is that we have a significant number of congregations for whom survival is a priority and all their energy is taken up with "keeping the show on the road". Whilst this may be dismissed as lacking in mission planning I wonder if sometimes we are apt to forget that in putting all our effort into new initiatives and activities we might lose the ministry of presence and the significance of the holy place.

*Howard Sharp*

#### **4. Yorkshire Synod**

..... Every Synod engages with vision2020 in a different way. Here in Yorkshire it may seem as though we are approaching vision2020 in a very low key way. I suppose that is true, but not because we don't think much of it – quite the opposite. Yorkshire has often heard me say that the church suffers from project-overload. As though trying to justify itself, the church churns out projects, strategies and plans. What happens to them? They are binned, shelved or lost under piles of other worthy literature! Sadly there can often be good stuff we could use for God's mission, but it is lost.

We do not want vision2020 to be remembered as that good idea we never did! Vision2020 is not someone's hobby-horse, a luxury extra to do if we have any time left, which we won't! Nor is vision 2020 another unconnected project to fill a vacuum after Vision4Life.

In Yorkshire we want vision2020 to be at the heart of our synod's life. It is the test of how good Vision4Life has been – by the fruit we see through vision2020. We think vision2020 is a great tool that can help in Yorkshire to turn us around from decline to growth, from being inward-looking to building God's kingdom.

We have therefore embedded vision2020 into the heart of

- preparing church profiles,
- our new Church Life Reviews,
- helping churches to focus on their mission.
- our assessing applications for the new Synod Mission Grants.

We invite each church to look at the 10 Mission Statements - not to panic, but be encouraged as to what we are already doing, then, to be realistic as to what we can do - and focus on only one or two and aim to do them well as a church! And then, maybe risk planting some seeds.

So, sorry folk – no fancy launches or razzamatazz – simply the commitment from this synod to pick up this tool and tend the garden. Called vision2020 – we pray we will see the beauty of God's Kingdom!

Kevin Watson

## 5. East Midlands Synod

### ***How are you as a synod engaging with vision2020?***

1. The synod bases its synod strategy on the principles of vision2020 and has ensured local churches have understood the principles of vision2020. We have done this in several ways:

- Distribution of information direct to churches.
- A session at a synod meeting.
- Mention of vision2020 at County Roadshows
- Working with churches reviewing their pastorate profile.
- Working with ministers at events to raise the awareness of the principles of vision2020.
- Some applications for grant aid have been linked with church work on vision2020.

### ***What progress have you made?***

As above. Our Executive Group will be asked to consider further work to be undertaken in January.

### ***What challenges are you encountering in your engagement with vision2020?***

As with other recent initiatives ensuring synod groups, churches, ministers and Elders give due attention to such initiatives is difficult to gauge.

### ***How does vision2020 fit with your synod's priorities?***

It fits in well: see first question.

### ***Is there any further help or support you need?***

With regard to further help and support the Synod Executive will be asked to review progress and if help is required we will be in contact.

Duncan Smith

## 6. West Midlands Synod

### ***How are you as a synod engaging with vision2020?***

We see it as a means of helping local churches especially and the synod to

- map clearly the areas of church life in which we are currently engaged i.e. 'where we are now', by using the statements of mission and purpose;
- see 'where we are going' by using the pledges as a tool to help decide the next steps.

### ***What progress have you made?***

1/ At synod level we have developed a strategy document which maps the areas of our life using the 'Statements'. It is strongly based on the vision2020 structure. That is to say under each statement we have an aim. Under the aim we have a series of indicators which spell out our (mainly) measurable targets.

The aims and indicators have been developed bearing in mind the outcomes from two processes in the synod over the last 5 years (the synod's Catch the Vision consultation in 2007 and the Mission Committee's consultation on vision2020 in 2009). Together these identified areas of local church life for which urgent support was needed. Our response has included establishing a Mission Fund, a Special Category Ministry Evangelist post, a revamped Youth and Children's Work policy as well as a Ministerial deployment policy in line with Challenge to the Church. That responsiveness to local needs we intend to keep going as more churches undertake mission pledges.

2/ We are encouraging local pastorates to engage with the mission pledges. This mainly by:

- the rolling out of the Local Mission & Ministry Review process. This seems to us absolutely key as a means of regularly engaging with local churches as they reflect on their mission and ministry and identify the pledges for the next stage of their journey.

- using synod in its more formal and experimental form (we have had two residential experimental synods in the last two years) together with Roadshows around the Areas in the last 18 months to speak of vision2020 and the pledges. We have focussed on helping churches to see how the confusing plethora of resources and initiatives that currently exist can be accessed and understood better by using the pledges. That is to say if they know what their next steps are they can better identify the resources they need for taking those steps. In that sense vision 2020 is not an extra burden but a means to bring clarity and support

***What challenges are you encountering in your engagement with vision2020?***

- Communicating what it is about takes lots of time and energy but is essential because misunderstanding is a huge problem. For many in our churches what is common knowledge to most at Mission Council is either totally unknown or a highly confusing sea of jargon. The loss of District Councils amongst other things has left a (perceived) gap between synod and local church which we are still working to bridge.
- We are still at the stage of struggling to get a comprehensive handle on which churches have already made pledges. We are also some way off engaging with the challenges of moving to a more sophisticated level of making pledges where churches might share pledges in partnership or where synod and churches might have closer conversation about their pledge making and synod's resources.
- At synod level it is a difficult task to make sure that our targets are measurable and achievable and that we have in place a system of reviewing those targets. We have not yet fully nailed this but are on the case.
- Getting a good number of trained partners for Local Mission & Ministry Review and having churches get into the good habit of using it to develop and redevelop mission pledges is going to be medium to long game. But nevertheless we are targeting all pastorates undertaking Local Mission & Ministry Review by the end of 2014. Churches can of course (and are) developing Mission Pledges without waiting for their Local Mission & Ministry Review.

***How does vision2020 fit with your synod's priorities?***

They are integrated (see 2 above) – but we have yet to take the step of articulating synod pledges to assembly and identifying resources that we might need to meet them.

***Is there any further help or support you need?***

Yes – but too early to say in what ways!

***Are there any other comments you would like to make?***

There is a feeling that it would be good if the next few years allowed us to concentrate on existing initiatives rather than adding further ones.

Roy Lowes

## **7. Eastern Synod**

***How are you as a synod engaging with vision2020?***

Our main way of engaging with vision2020 is through the LMMR process, where it forms a part of the review process. The first ten churches are doing this in 2011. Some local churches are looking at vision2020 for themselves and we are planning a vision2020 Synod Day in mid-June 2012.

***What progress have you made?***

The visit of Francis Brienen to our 'Ministers Get Together 2011' was a good opportunity to take time to reflect on this initiative. The posters have just gone out to local churches. Both will raise awareness and keep the momentum moving. Vision2020 was highlighted as part

of the Moderator's address to the October Synod Meeting. We have appointed a Synod Church Growth and Evangelism Advocate from January 2012, who will be promoting vision2020 as part of his new role.

***What challenges are you encountering in your engagement with vision2020?***

Many churches simply feel overwhelmed by all that has come out of Church House and they need help to see that this is not another job to be done but a useful tool for their mission and outreach. For some the idea of vision2020 seems to be too far away to be real, feedback indicating that they cannot see it as being worth their time if results are 10 years away. We are aware that education is needed in this area.

***How does vision2020 fit with your synod's priorities?***

Our synod policies and grant system are based on showing mission priorities. Our new heritage property fund asks local churches to use vision2020 to show us their priorities. Over time I would see vision2020 being the groundwork for all grants.

***Is there any further help or support you need?***

We anticipate that the Synod vision2020 day in June will help. We are asking Tracey Lewis, URC Mission Committee Convener (elect), to come to speak to us at that event and we will run workshops to help people's knowledge and understanding of vision2020. Hands on materials would be a great help to resource our churches, particularly worship resources for Sunday and/or Church Meeting or group use.

***Are there any other comments you would like to make?***

We anticipate it will take time and patience as congregations are encouraged to engage with vision2020 as a tool to take mission forward.

*Linda Harrison, Peter Ball*

## **8. South Western Synod**

Report to be tabled at the meeting.

## **9. Wessex Synod**

Wessex synod has not dealt with vision2020 as a separate priority. However, there are a number of ways in which it has been, and continues to be promoted within the life of the synod.

- Churches in ministerial transition have been looking at mission priorities as they prepare profiles.
- As LMMR is being introduced in churches, from this autumn, they are being encouraged to look at mission priorities and to set targets in line with the v2020 statements.
- Francis Brienen was invited to a Ministers' day earlier this year to explain more about vision2020 and encourage ministers to use the framework in their ongoing life and mission.
- We have surveyed our churches to identify which of the vision2020 indicators is their highest priority.
- Our November synod will be concentrating on vision2020. This will be done within worship, items of business (including resolutions from individuals), workshops around some of the statements and looking at our world church links.
- We are reviewing our Synod Strategy in early 2012 and vision2020 will be a central part of that process.

*Clare Downing*

## **10. Thames North Synod**

We have been introducing vision2020 for more than two years at various forums. The Mission Initiatives Group had a consultation day on mission policy in January 2011 which

was based on vision2020. We have tried to build the principles of Bread to Spare into the framework of vision2020. Vision2020 was also presented at the Spring Synod meeting.

The Mission Initiatives Group has developed application forms for its Mission Fund in line with the Mission Committee guidelines for vision2020 funding. In addition, knowing that the Assembly vision2020 grants budget is limited, the Synod will fund the vision2020 applications coming from Thames North churches. The process and accountability will be the same, also for the sake of statistics.

We are discussing how information received by Church House on churches' engagement with vision2020 can be shared with us. This will help us to know how many churches have responded and are committed to taking up vision2020. Vision2020 could become our main mission strategy if the take up by the churches has been significant.

*Andrew Prasad*

### **11. Southern Synod**

The introduction of vision2020 to Southern Synod came at time when synod was grappling with the practical issues of restructuring the way in which synod works out its life and witness through local churches, synod and united areas. Alongside this, a new and radical way for deploying ministers was introduced and Synod Mission Criteria were being written. Vision2020, whilst being acknowledged by synod as a useful tool for mission, was seen in many local churches as 'just another initiative' from the national URC.

Information was disseminated in local churches and many local churches and individuals did provide feedback to the Mission Committee. Vision2020 was introduced at synod meetings with time on the agenda given to information sharing about its progress. Indeed the Southern Synod Mission Criteria was loosely based both on the 5 Marks of Mission and the 10 mission priorities of vision2020. However, at this point in the life of the synod, vision 2020 did not fit in with synod priorities. It was not that Southern Synod disagreed with the framework but that the initiative did not seem to take into account that the synod may have other frameworks that would be facilitating local churches in their mission.

At present Southern Synod continues to use the Synod Mission Criteria which undergirds all its thinking in preference to other initiatives. The Synod Mission Criteria is instrumental in helping the local church look at, and prioritise, its mission most particularly when considering deployment and LMMR.

Southern Synod continues to pass on information from Church House to local churches regarding vision2020.

*Nicola Furley-Smith*

### **12. Wales**

Report to be tabled at the meeting.

### **13. Scotland**

Vision2020 is being used to varying degrees in Scotland. Church Meetings do not need to report their use or indeed their lack of use of vision2020 to the synod, though some are sharing their stories of vision2020. Vision2020 is advocated as one of the tools available for local churches to use in planning their intentions and ministry into the future. In particular the synod understands and affirms the close connection between vision2020 and LMMR. Instead of seeing these as competing for congregations' energy, vision2020 is advocated as one of the tools available for developing the church profile and for measuring movement in

the life of congregations. The regular building up of the pastorate profile which LMMR aspires to achieve is in itself an expression of vision2020's achievable pledges.

As for the synod the ethos behind vision2020 is not a new approach. In the autumn synod of 2005 after discussion and amendment the synod decided on a five year approach to certain aspects of the synod's life around the theme of developing *intentionality*. This culminated in a gathering of folk from around the synod. In the driving rain of a Scottish June Saturday around 450-500 people travelled from as far afield as Thurso and Annan for a day on the Perth race course (it was not a race meeting!). The day was an opportunity for workshops and worship, but as importantly for meeting and sharing the stories, particularly the intentional stories of congregations. The five year process had touched many congregations with intentionality in a variety of ways; congregations have continued with the theme, not necessarily using that 'word!'

The synod spent time identifying the principles that should undergird re-structuring when Assembly restructured the denomination. Synod spent an 18 month period developing its *aspirations*. This was done through a variety of road shows, college educational opportunities and synod discussions.

The synod's eight aspirations are:



One of the issues that has become clear is the sense that many congregations had of being damped by 'initiative overload'. To this end synod sought to make it clearer how Assembly initiatives relate to each other and how they can also complement the on-going life of the synod. In August 2010 we held a 24-hour consultation on how we could be less burdened by synod and Assembly initiatives and how these often complement each other whilst initially appearing to be in competition.

The current foci of synod include finance, deployment, the development of collaborative ministry, communication and a continuing commitment to meet the demands of our particular context. There is a sense of wanting to allow things to take root.

*John Humphreys*