

5 Marks of Mission for MU
8th October 2020

Thank you very much, Maureen and Mary for inviting me to talk to you at this AGM. I am so sorry that we are not cosily in Benson Village Hall, but zoom is a wonderful thing, as I am sure you are all discovering, and one of its benefits is how it can bring people together across great geographical distances at minimal carbon cost! Talking to an amazing group of women from a huge variety of different backgrounds and experiences.

Maureen's asked if I'll talk with you for a few minutes about the 5 marks of mission and about the work of the Oxford Diocese Partnership in World Mission, PWM, which I chair. I'd like this to be a conversation, not just me talking at you, so we're going to use the tech to make this happen.

Some of you will be very familiar with what I am going to talk about and others less so. The 5 marks of mission were formulated in 1984 as a guiding mission statement for the Anglican Communion, and they are used very widely across the world. Between them, they cover the whole Gospel message. I'm sure you're all very familiar with them, but here's a quick reminder of what they are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Proclaiming the good news – this happens when we notice and tell where we have seen God at work in our lives and the lives of those we partner with. When we share what the Spirit is saying to us. When we rejoice together.

Teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers – this happens when we share reflections that deepen our discipleship; when we share what we are experiencing and learning on the journey of faith and what tools we have found help us; when we read the Bible together, pray and encourage each other.

Responding to human need in loving service – this happens when we become aware of need and make or encourage a courageous and compassionate response to it.

Seeking to transform unjust structures of society – this happens when we educate and inform ourselves and others about the impact of these structures, and when we engage in advocacy, campaigning and prayer. The 16 days of action on gender based violence is a great example of this.

Striving to safeguard the integrity of all creation and sustaining and renewing the life of the Earth – this happens when we share responsibility for our planet; when we tell stories, build awareness, pray, support, take and encourage environmental action at every level. Looking at every aspect of our lives – our homes, our travel, our investments...

Now the thing about the 5 marks of mission is that they are not a shopping list, they are more like a dance. One of those wonderful country dances in which the dancers create

interweaving patterns as they strip the willow, or form teapots, sides, circles, stars, dosidos. Sometimes the pace is fast and energetic, sometimes it is slower and more stately. But all are included, everyone gets a chance to do everything, and the 5 marks work together.

There are some churches which aren't able to see the 5 marks as a dance. They look at them as a list of options. So you'll find churches which focus on the first and second marks – proclamation and teaching, baptising and nurturing faith. You'll find churches which are focussed on what they can do to meet the needs they see around them, running foodbanks, credit unions, debt counselling, night shelters, lunch clubs and so on. They serve the community. You'll find churches which see their mission as being to challenge the systems which create the conditions where people are in need – campaigning, marching, letter writing, signing petitions and so on. And you'll find eco-churches which find their identity in focussing on the environmental crisis, and the care of God's world. Most churches will do a bit of a mixture, but the spread tends to be a bit uneven.

But of course, we can't leave anything out, because it is all of God, it's all the Gospel.

I have been the Bishop of Reading for almost a year. As a diocese we have a Common Vision which about being a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world. It's a beautiful and elegant vision because it provokes deep questions about the way in which we do things. We are encouraged to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous. And to be more Christ-like in everything we do. And the 5 marks of mission are a great framework against which to check that we are covering the whole gospel in what we do.

I have a couple of responsibilities which I hold for the whole diocese which intersect with the work of the Mother's Union. The first is the environmental emergency, which is a concern for all of us – climate change, loss of biodiversity, plastic pollution, air pollution and so on. The MU has a particular heart for families across the globe, and this is an issue which will affect our children and grandchildren to an extreme degree if we do not tackle it. And there are MU branches across the world which are working hard on tree planting, on vegetable gardening, on soil and water conservation, on seed banks and so on. Care of our planet is, or should be, a watermark running through all of our lives and activities.

The second portfolio I hold is to Chair the Council for Partnership in World Mission, and I am delighted that the MU, with its worldwide membership and concerns is one of the mission agencies with which we connect. The MU has a spread which is impressive, and I know from first hand how energetic, vibrant and inspiring the MU is in the parts of Africa I've visited.

The Council for Partnership in World Mission is a Diocese of Oxford Council which does what it says on the tin. The problem is that what it says on the tin is rather vague, and doesn't help us to work out what we should be doing. So what I have been doing with it is to think about the relationships between PWM and our UK based mission agencies, and the MU, local and worldwide, and our 3 link dioceses in South Africa, South India and Sweden, and our 130 or so parishes which have overseas links, and the dozen or so bishops from other parts of the Anglican communion who we were due to host for the Lambeth conference this year, now postponed to 2022. The question I'm asking is, how should we connect to each other? How can we learn from each other and encourage each other? How can we pray for

each other? And what part does each of us play in God's holistic and integral mission in the world? We should have scope for an exceptionally rich conversation.

When the PWM executive got together with the mission agencies in the Spring (Marion Gunning was there representing MU), we talked about the 5 marks of mission and how each of us was working on the various strands. We saw that mission is multi-faceted. What used to be 18th or 19th century societies of missionaries, who went to the far flung parts of the globe to convert the heathen, is now a vibrant partnership in the gospel in many parts of the world. And of course at home. We are all engaged in God's dance? And I want very much to encourage a sense that we are together in God's enterprise of love at home and across the world.

Dancing together. Joining up our actions, activities and prayer. Creating beautiful and intricate patterns and connections. We can't separate these 5 marks of mission, and we can't neglect any of them – they are one, and made one in Christ, who reconciles all things to God in himself.