

When Church Stops Working Book Study, Presbytery of Niagara
Chapter 6: Forget the Mission Statement – Get a Watchword

Summary:

- Economic changes started in the 80's.
- Businesses and churches had to know *why* they existed in order to survive
- Therefore: a mission statement, which was vital to growth; “money follows mission”
- A mission statement is an agreement about how a group of people will direct their actions.
- It is human-centred and doesn't lead to waiting
- Mission statements alone lead to enforce immanence, acceleration, and burnout
- The watchword is the foundation that the waiting church builds on.
- It's shorthand for a story of a deep experience that has shaped a community by an encounter with God.
- A watchword directs our attention; it holds a mystery; it forms us
- It is the lens through which we look out into the world for the living God
- Our waiting isn't a dull inaction but an attentiveness, and the watchword shapes our attention.
- People need a mission, but it needs to be conditioned by a watchword that comes from God's action
- A watchword must be found by the community. Two moves that help in finding a watchword:
 1. Learn how to encounter each other: where do I see God in my life and in the life of the people around me? How is God a character in that story?
 2. Learn to wait in the right way so that we can encounter God: where do we see God working in our midst for the salvation of our world?
- The church leadership begins by listening for stories within the community
- The watchword is found through discernment of a theme among these stories
- Slogans become flat when they are disconnected from the stories of our lives
- “Unless it's worth dying for, it's not worth living for.” Brands/slogans are not worth dying for.
- To really encounter someone is to see and hear, and to be seen and heard
- There are necessary practical and ethical boundaries to encounters. Power balance helps.
- The hope in truly encountering each other is that we might hear and see God.
- When deeply seeing and hearing each other, we may delight in each other. This can lead to the desire to serve each other
- We might encounter God in sunsets, flowers, or music, but not necessarily.
- Preaching, prayer and mission are more likely places where we might encounter God.
- An encounter with another person prepares us to encounter God
- We have a chance to encounter God when we spend time reading the Bible
- Waiting means that God can surprise us, shake us, move us.
- 5 questions that ensure God remains the main character of the Biblical story:
 1. What is God's Good News in this text?
 2. What conversion does God call for in this text?
 3. What does God reveal about us and the world in this text?
 4. What does this text reveal about God's future?

5. Where does God send us through this text?

- But before we hear these things, we must wait attentively.
- We *see* God through sacraments – actions that take place in the context of prayer.
- A watchword often arrives within the church but in relation to the world.
- There are no hard-and-fast rules to God revealing a watchword, but look for it at the margins of your life together, where the church and the world meet.

Discussion:

- It was refreshing to see the return to basics: prayer, Bible, and mission, rather than business practices such as “management by objectives”
- “Eaton’s had a wonderful mission statement, look at them now.”
- Branding and slogans are not going to save the church
- A slogan is not personal, but aspirational. A watchword reflects your story. The watchword is much closer to the holy.

Valuing each other as equals, work towards truly encountering each other, seeing and hearing, and also being seen and heard. Please ensure that group members feel safe. The goal is not to answer the following questions, but to encounter each other on a deeper level than you might at the church coffee hour. I’ve provided sample starters, but it’s not about them. Ask follow-up questions and see where the Spirit leads you.

- If you had a whole day where you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?
- What’s been on your heart and mind recently?
- What do you really care about?
- What really frustrates you?
- Who are you most like in your family?
- Who in your family do you struggle with?
- What brings you joy?

Feedback from ‘encountering another’:

- Joyful
- New perspective
- We have a lot in common – losing loved ones, reactions to world events, etc.
- Sharing pain; empathy; safe; relationship building
- Feeling seen and heard feels good

1. Does your church have a mission statement? What is it?

- Every church has one, but we had to google them to know what they were!

2. Can you articulate in your own words the difference between a mission statement and a watchword?

- Mission statement
 - Is about what you’re going to do in the future

- It's about *our* actions
- 'It's on a plaque, not in our minds'
- We spend a lot of time wordsmithing the statement
- Watchword
 - Is about God's actions
 - It reminds us who we are
 - It is succinct
 - It comes to us from God

3. How can we get a watchword?

- We wait
- Encounter, engage, listen for God
- Paying attention to stories and themes in the congregation
- Crying out to God
- Letting go of trying to control

A suggestion was made that we intentionally begin each day with a prayer that we might encounter God; and that we end each day in reflection: "where did I encounter God today?"