

Leading the Church of Ireland Parish beyond Maintenance towards Mission

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses one of the most pressing needs for churches today: to rediscover their missionary zeal and become vibrant communities of faith where mission and outreach lie at heart of the culture of the local parish church. In essence this dissertation researches the process of leading a typical Church of Ireland parish beyond the mindset of maintenance. My research responds to the biblical, theological and practical imperatives for contemporary missional leadership and asks how an ordained leader might lead their congregation to a place where mission becomes a vital part of the local parish church.

Beginning with an assessment of the cultural changes that have impacted parishes across Ireland I will argue that churches need to rediscover the missionary purposes of God and discern how those purposes might be furthered in their local context. Throughout the course of this dissertation focus is given to baptism as the motivation for ministry and collaboration as essential to missional leadership. My thesis is that moving a parish beyond maintenance involves investing in the lives of the congregation and building collaborative structures to further God's missionary purposes. We will explore how identifying, nurturing and releasing the gifts of the laity for mission and ministry are fundamental to realising the goal of vibrant, missional parishes within the Church of Ireland. The role of Mission Action Planning (MAP) will provide a model for developing a more missional culture.

In order to gain a broad cross section of research material I have employed a number of investigative tools including: interviews with specialised practitioners, a two week placement in a rural Church renowned for their mission and outreach, attendance at a Church Growth Conference, academic publications, academic journals and my own experience of ministry in my Internship parish.