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Mapping: a search conference

Lloyd Vidler and Bob Dick (1985) *Mapping: Planning for the Future of the Division of Mission and Parish Services* [of the Queensland Synod of The Uniting Church]. Unpublished mimeo.

A report of a visioning and planning exercise jointly facilitated and reported on by Lloyd Vidler and myself.

Introduction

This document reports on two conferences which were conducted for the Division of Mission and Parish Services of the Queensland Synod of The Uniting Church.

It begins by setting out data concerning the formation of the department .

Formation of the Department of Mission and Parish Services

As a result of the work of the Task Force on Management, a report relating to the management of Synod Departments of the Queensland Synod of The Uniting Church was adopted at the Synod of 1983.

The Synod agreed to the establishment of 4 Departments, one of which was to be The Department of Mission & Parish Services .

An Interim Commission was appointed. It prepared the Mandate & Objectives for the Department.

Mandate for the Department

The Mandate for the Department of Mission and Parish Services arises out of the needs of the life and mission of the Uniting Church and the responsibilities of the Synod, as set out in the Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations and the decisions of the Synod from time to time.

Basis of Union (Para. 15d) declares that the Synod “has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church’s worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it, with such powers and authorities as may from time to time be determined by the Assembly.” (See also Interim Constitution Para. 32 and Assembly Regulations 3.5.11 and 12.)

Regulations 3.5.42-46 give authority to the Synod to “establish such bodies as it sees fit to carry out such duties and responsibilities as the Synod may determine” and establishes the provisions for such bodies.

The Management Structure adopted by the 1983 Synod establishes several “bodies” called Departments and declares that “the Department shall be responsible for, and give oversight to, such functions, activities and agencies as shall be determined from time to time by the Synod, provided always that in matters of

common interest to more than one department, there shall be co-operation between departments. The Departments shall be organised on the basis of such Boards/Committees/Divisions as shall be determined by the Council of the Synod on the recommendation of the respective Directors and their Commissions having due regard to statutory and constitutional requirements.

Each Department will be under oversight of a Commission.

The Department of Mission and Parish Services is responsible for “maintaining (in association with Presbyteries) services to promote the growth and life of the Church as a whole, and particularly in congregations and parishes, including world and local mission.

Objectives of the Department

1. To serve the mission of the Church/Basis of Union as described in the Basis of Union by seeking to fulfil effectively the purposes of the Church as these relate directly or indirectly to the several functions committed to the Department by the Synod.
 2. To research the Theology and Sociology of mission and reflect the results of that research in educational, nurturing, supporting, training and motivating relationships throughout the Church.
 3. To receive an understanding of mission needs as they are expressed by Parish, Presbytery and other Departments, and to both stimulate and respond to the continuing dialogue.
 4. To provide consultancy and field services, to make resources available for Presbyteries and Parishes and, in general, to express the role of the Synod in the functions within the Department’s Charter.
 5. To liaise with Departments with parallel functions within other Synods and the Assembly, and to pursue such relationships as will provide mutual support and co-ordination, and express the national dimension of the Church’s life.
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6. To provide an atmosphere which supports the maintenance of staff fellowship, support and efficiency and in which visitors to the department and its staff are received.
7. To encourage staff to develop their professional expertise to serve in a way that is personally and professionally satisfying, and to find the worthwhileness of serving within the life and Mission of the Church.

At a meeting of the Synod Standing Committee in June 1984, John Mavor was designated as Director of the Department to commence duties on January 1st, 1985.

In the period prior to his assumption of duties, John Mavor saw that among his first objectives would be the task of:

- bringing together disparate divisions into a new Department
- developing a common purpose
- identifying priorities
- formulating an appropriate structure.

To assist in the achievement of those objectives Lloyd Vidler (Parish Minister, N.S.W. Synod and member of Canberra Search Conference Study Group) and Bob Dick, (Department of Psychology, University of Queensland and Centre of Applied Behavioural Science, Brisbane) were invited to lead two Conferences. The first conference was to establish goals and priorities into the future and the second was to move towards the establishment of an appropriate structure for the Department.

Processes used in achieving objectives of the conference

It was readily agreed among Mavor, Vidler and Dick that the conference should be of a participatory nature. That decision suited Mavor's needs in respect

to developing trust and common purpose and suited the styles of Vidler and Dick.

The membership of the conference was limited to 30 — 35 people who were representative of staff — from professional to clerical — and members of the Commission. Representation from the latter group also ensured that the experience and insight of Presbyteries and Parishes was available to the conference.

The interactions in the Conference would possibly have been enhanced by the presence of some representatives of other Departments of the Synod, young people involved in Mission and Parish Services and members of the general community whose work and interests bore some relationship to the responsibilities of Mission and Parish Services.

Perhaps we could say something like this. “In the normal course of events, we favour good representation from inside and outside the client organisation. We would usually make this choice even where it means that total numbers become a little unwieldy. On this occasion we had two reasons for choosing differently. Firstly, we assumed there would be more real contact for John Mavor with the smaller numbers. Secondly, and most important, we saw the month between the two conferences as an opportunity to achieve wide representation without having large numbers actually at the conference. This intervening month was a particular feature of the conference, and one we will comment on again below”.

The value of that decision can be seen in, and may be evaluated by, the level of commitment to the vision developed in the conferences and the growth in teamwork and co-operation in the Department.

There was a high level of commitment to both Conferences evidenced in attendance and participation in the work of the Conferences.

The membership of both Conferences was the same with the exception of one or two people who for various reasons had to come and go.

Although both conferences were loosely spoken of as a Search Conference, it is helpful to recognise that the first Conference was conducted in the manner of a Search Conference ('Search' is a technique for participative planning), while the second Conference sought to help participants towards adequate interpersonal relationships and structure. Some methods used in the second conference included:

- Team Building using Jungian typology
- Goal Setting
- Force Field Analysis — a problem analysis technique for group use
- Event Track — a technique for developing detailed action plans

The two conferences must be seen as a whole — the second building on the first and the first not having a developed outcome without the second.

A period of some three weeks elapsed between the first and second Conference. It was used as a time in which participants shared the vision developed in the first Conference with fellow workers, members of congregations and Presbyteries. It was a useful innovation as it allowed for a testing of the vision developed in the first Conference. Participants often forget that what has been a very meaningful experience for them may not mean very much to anyone else. The reactions of non participants in the first Conference became data for the second Conference. Generally speaking the reaction and comments of non participants served to encourage those who had been participants.

There was a high acceptance of the work of the first Conference so that participants were confirmed in the work they had done and the direction they had taken as they commenced the second Conference.

To this point we have discussed the process of Conferences.

The material which follows is a discussion of the content of the two Conferences.

The future

There are many factors which will affect the life of the Church in the future. The Church, through its institutionalized form and by the work of individual members will have some affect on the future.

The future will be one increasing polarization between:

- rich and poor
- black and white
- employed and unemployed
- peace movement / arms race
- those with food, shelter and nurture / those without
- left and right

There will be an increase in technology which will lead to:

- high unemployment
- more early retirements
- increase in time for leisure
- invasion of privacy
- improved methods of communication
- access to information
- new ethical problems

There will be a growth in the sense of community evidenced in:

- increased acceptance of handicapped and other marginalised people
 - development of environmental awareness
 - a demand for local autonomy
 - changes in family life will continue with a growing variety of family relationship patterns
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There will be an increase in mobility and privatization.

Bureaucracies will increase and minority groups (aborigines , women, young people, ethnic groups) will take more power into their hands.

There will a growth in the multi-cultural nature of Australian society with an increase in Asianization.

The Church's numerical strength and moral leadership will decline. The 'traditional' church is likely to disappear but out of that demise a revitalized church will appear. Third-world countries will make a major contribution to a new Australian Church as will individuals' search for personal meaning and the pursuit of spirituality.

We will be surrounded by increasing unrest and violence with war as a real possibility.

There will be an increase in stress related diseases.

Responding for the future

It will be desirable to enable people to:

- recognize change
 - accept the reality of the changes which will occur
 - provide people with skills to live in the 'new society'
 - encourage partnership and co-operation
 - encourage openness and trust
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The church and the future

If the Church is to contribute helpfully in the future it will have to

- grasp the nettle
- plan its priorities and use its resources
- identify with the poor
- develop its worship, teaching and nurture
- plant new congregations

Priorities for the future for the Department of Mission and Parish Services

The Department for Mission and Parish Services will best be able to contribute through:

- providing services to improve the quality of congregational life
- encouraging improvement in quality of individual life
- improving quality of staff life (improved inter-personal communication, personal development, spiritual growth and continuing education)
- developing an effective departmental structure

Theological framework

As the motivation for a church group arises out of their understanding of God, man and society, it is important for such a group to come to terms with their theological understanding.

Within the Department of Mission and Parish Services there is a high motivation arising from strong devotional faith.

There is a consciousness of obeying Christ's command as an external authority.

While there is some consciousness of Biblical themes in the Department, there are signs that faith is in mottoes of personal faith.

More thought may be given to the development of an adequate theological framework for the Department so that themes like:

- incarnation
- hope
- justice

which were germinal in the Conference become the setting in which the Department will do its work.

It will be appropriate therefore for the Department to encourage and for staff and commission members to participate in theological reflection so that out of the encounter of the faith of individuals, and the faith of the church with the society in which the church witnesses there shall come a growth in theological understanding and insight.

Adequate development of Mission and Parish Services will require a clear theological framework and a robust faith.

Developing an aim

Some of the theological deficiencies which may have been evident in the Conference were redressed to some extent as participants worked during the second Conference on the development of an aim for the Department.

Primary data out of which the aim was developed was provided by the vision of what the Department would have accomplished had it achieved the goal it set itself for 1995.

The first Conference was set the task ...

“it is now 1995. During the past decade , the Department has been extremely effective in its work — beyond anyone’s expectations. Now , in 1995, you are about to go out and catalogue the results of your Department’s superb work. What do you expect to see in the Department, in the community, and in the church?

The first thirteen priorities were :

1. Effective structures, good decision-making, good relationships , minimal fuss;
2. Christians living out and sharing vital faith;
3. Vibrant, varied participation in worship ;
4. Staff growing , personal development, spiritual growth, continued education;
5. Quality congregation life caused by more efficient Synod Services;
6. Parishes integrated into life of local community;
7. Each congregation following mission plan and enjoying it;
8. Christians known for their love and compassion;
9. Committee support for poor and oppressed at all levels;
10. Committed trained leadership;
11. Lay Youth and education officers in most Parishes;
12. Efficient and effective self-nurture become care for community and world;
13. In-depth discipleship enabled.

It was recognized that the priorities may be expressed under four headings :

1. Quality of congregational life;
 2. Quality of individual life;
 3. Quality of staff life;
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4. Structure of Department.

Working firstly as individuals, then in small groups and subsequently in a planning session, members of the conference developed an aim for the Department:

“In response to Christ’s message of grace, hope and love, the Department for Mission and Parish Services seeks to offer a “servant Leadership” within the life and Mission of the Uniting Church in Queensland.

“To enable this to happen the Mission and Parish Services Department will work out of an appropriate structure which facilitates mission and is responsive to the needs of individuals, Parishes and societies.

“It will seek to enable individual Christians and congregations to come to a strong personal and corporate understanding and experience of the Christian life and to a discipleship which shares a living faith and bears witness to God’s Kingdom.”

To have reached consensus on an aim was a major achievement in the task of working with meanings and interpretation. The process is also a major achievement in the development of cohesion within the Department.

The achievement of consensus was aided by the desire to express the aim of the Department in a form which was so general that it could embrace the divergent activities of the Department. But consensus is hard to maintain, “Even if achieved at one moment of time, the consensus will break as new experiences cause perceptions to change” (Checkland, 1981).

The aim provided the long term direction for the Department. The processes for accomplishing the aim will differ for different groups within the Department and at different times.

While, therefore, the aim is an important achievement, it should encourage growth and development rather than hinder it. To hold to the aim and to allow it to inform the Department’s working will be important.

Three year goals

Having established a vision of the future, and gained some understanding of the way in which the church, and in particular the Department of Mission and Parish Services, may work to affect the future, members of the Conference set about establishing goals for the next 3 years.

Eighty seven suggested goals were offered. These were categorized into 26 groups. Of the 26 goals

- Some were for plenary discussion in response to working party recommendations
- Some were for plenary report so that action plans were known
- Some were for 'back-home' follow up.

Comment will be made on action plans and 'back-home' follow up before dealing with working party recommendations for plenary discussion.

Action plans for immediate implementation

Action plans covering three areas of priority were presented. They covered the following areas:

- Provision of resources which will enable individual Christians and congregations to acknowledge the new life they enjoy in God's kingdom and to equip them to impart this to others.
 - Enabling members to be open to all people for the sake of the gospel.
 - Improvement of Parish clergy and Department of Mission and Parish Services staff relations. Detail of the reports is contained in the Report of the Second Conference pages 12-21.
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With the development and implementation of these action plans, there is clear evidence that the Conference has its outcome in action rather than words. This is a satisfying achievement for the participants who can see the fulfillment of some of their work in these plans •

‘Back home’ follow up

A number of tasks were left to be followed up following the Conference. It remains to be seen to what extent this will be done and to what extent staff will be able to let go their own goals and priorities in order to give expression to the vision, goals and priorities of the two Conferences.

Structure of Department of Mission and Parish Services

Two matters were given to working parties who were to bring recommendations for plenary discussion. These both related to the structure of the department and are taken up in this section of the report. Three other matters which impinge on structure will be mentioned first.

Preferences and style of the Director

An organisation will reflect the preferences and style of its leadership. With this in mind, it was important that members of the Conference had an opportunity to ‘meet’ John Mavor. The meeting took the form of an interview with John Mavor which sought to reveal his preferences and style and to discover “What others can do to make his job effective and satisfying” and “How he works to make others’ work effective and satisfying”.

Distinctiveness of staff and commission members

A participatory planning process seeks to make use of the gifts and experience of the members of the working team. The use of Jungian typology to discover the gifts of the participants, was a helpful experience in discovering why we are different when we compare ourselves with others and that it is OK to be different.

Participants in the Conferences also came to appreciate that a coming together of different personality types to work on a task enriches the experience and is likely to provide a better end-product. It was our intention to draw to the notice of those present that a mix of personality types enhances the process of structural planning and problem solving.

Environment for planning

The Department as presently constructed has within it a strong tradition begun in separate denominations and continued in separate Departments and Divisions since Union. The differences need to be recognized so that they will not become an impediment into the future. Some of the experiences, the memory of some of the personalities and the particular ethos evident in former structures appear to be overpowering and inhibiting to a degree.

The environment for planning will include the part of all those parts coming into the Department, the insights gained in the journey towards the formation of the Department together with the vision of the future developed by participants at the Conferences.

Team building

The Conferences were themselves important experiences in team building. The continuation of team building was seen to be an important component towards the development of a satisfactory structure.

The working group on team building presented the following report to the Conference.

1. We affirm the importance of
 - Acceptance
 - Trust
 - Patience
 - Openness
 - Support
 - Respect
 - Listening
 - Sharing our vision as we work towards fulfilling our aim
 2. Assuming that we will be operating as one Department we recommend that the structure :
 - enable good staff relationships to be fostered;
 - allow for the sharing of money and resources (the strong help the weak);
 - plan for a fair distribution of work;
 - include clear lines of authority / relationship;
 - make possible support group / committee if necessary or desired;
 - reflect the attitude that in a 11 we do and say, we are one team that "*we are working together*"
 3. To enable the above we recommend:—
 1. Field staff gathering (3 day)MAY
 2. (2 day incl. 1 day retreat) visions revisitedAUGUST
 3. Family, Fun (optional) gathering (1 day)NOVEMBER
 4. Department Staff Seminar (1 week) (incl. 1 day retreat)FEBRUARY
 5. Adopt a prayer diary principle
 6. Adopt a staff link principle
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7. That staff be encouraged and freed to attend training workshops outside of work place (similar principles to Ministers of the Word) (Skills and personal development)
8. That staff training include skill development in relation to conflict resolution
9. That staff skills be shared between staff members and other Departments.
4. We recommend that the use of inclusive language be encouraged within the structure and preparation of resources.
5. That we invite the structural group to consider various approaches to decision-making which will contribute towards team-building.

Proposed structural models

Participants at the Conference had a high expectation of a new structure emerging from the two Conferences. Some of the components which are desired to be in that structure are evident. To hope that the Conference would have done much more than commence the journey towards an adequate structure, may have been asking more of the Conferences than they were able to deliver.

The Working Group seeking to develop one departmental structure presented two models to the Conference.

The first (model A) (Appendix 1) is a suggested structure to work towards in the next ten years. Revision in the light of subsequent experience and conditions will probably be desirable. The second (model B) (Appendix 2) is presented for immediate implementation after further discussion and refinement.

There is an evident desire to be a Department which will provide :

- leadership at a state level which will benefit Parish Life and development.
 - a desire to work together to achieve that end.
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- a capacity to maintain a purposeful direction.
- a flexibility to respond to specific short-term needs.

The Department needs to relate its vision to its budget planning so as to give assurance as far as possible that a steady forward movement is maintained.

In the past the Department's work has been frustrated by budgetary cuts. These have led to lowering of morale and some unhealthy contesting.

There is some overlapping of services from Division to Division which suggests that areas of responsibility may need some clarification.

Matters for further consideration

The Conference took their business to adequate conclusions and set tasks to be continued into the future. The long term effectiveness of the work done in the two Conferences will depend on the amount of energy which will be put into carrying the decisions of the Conferences into the future. It is easier to lapse into the known way than it is to forge a new path.

There are several matters which will need to be attended to with considerable vigour. To some extent they arise out of the wide variety of responsibilities given to the Department and the need to develop a pattern of working which will encourage the development of initiative and responsibility in congregations, Parishes and Presbyteries and at the same time allow the Department to provide stimulus so that the Synod will have Parishes which are equipped in the task of mission.

Senior management

The role of the Director should be clearly defined so that he has adequate time to devote to the Staff of the Department and maintaining links with appropriate

bodies in the state, ecumenically and nationally. The Director needs to keep an overview and provide guidance and counsel for the staff in their tasks. The danger is that the Director will become so involved in the day to day affairs of the Department that he will not have quality time to give to the motivation and consolidation of the work of his staff.

Middle management

The ability of the Director to fulfil the functions appropriate to his role will require the development of a suitable middle management structure. This task may be turned aside as being too hard as it has not been the habit of Synods to provide middle management for its Departments. There are better ways of management than the ones being currently followed and a way through can be found even though a new way will disrupt the familiar patterns.

Communication

The need for better communication was raised a number of times in the Conferences. It never became a major issue. Some matters of communication will be resolved as a result of better interpersonal understanding but it will not obviate the need for an adequate communication process.

There are several questions which might be addressed on the way to developing a communications system:

1. What has to be known.
2. By whom has it to be known.
3. By when has it to be known.

Contact with parishes and presbyteries

There was evidently a significant gain for the second conference in the manner in which participants shared the vision of the first conference and related their experience as participants.

The Department will continue to build the confidence of the constituency in the central structure of the church as it shares its vision and work and allows people to share in planning for the future. To continue to gather the reactions of ordinary people as a task to continue.

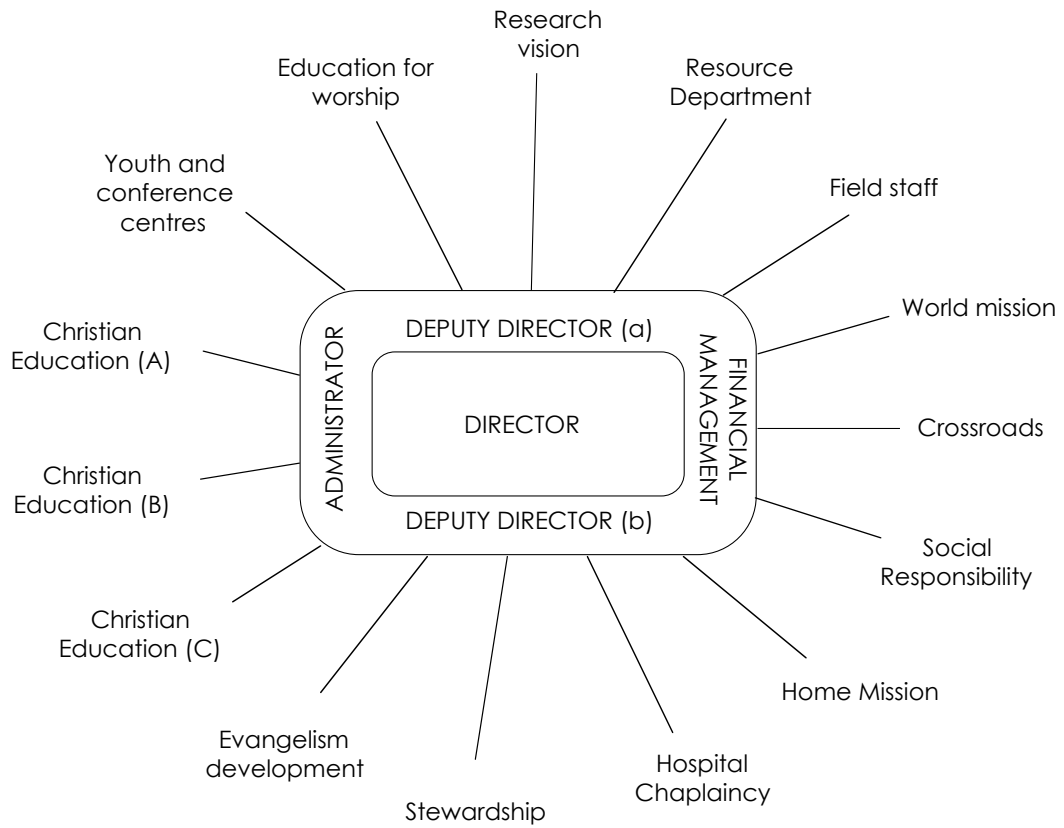
Identification of systems

The complexity of the work of the Department and the range of interrelationships it has to develop suggests that another task which the divisions may work at is the identification of the systems in which each is involved. *Systems thinking, systems practice* (Checkland, 1981) seems to provide an ideal way of looking at some of the problems which are present as a result of the complexity and variety of the work of the Department.

Definition of limitations

There is a tendency for Synods to refer to Departments a wide variety of tasks not all of which are relevant to the Department's work. The Department may be well advised to define the limitations of its task so that it does not become the repository for the consideration and implementation of every bright idea and new suggestion. The Department will never be able to fulfil its function if it becomes preoccupied with tasks which are not its own or which divert it from its main course.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

