

God's blueprints



One of the problems with a blueprint is that it appears so complicated to the uninitiated. It's filled with words and language that we don't commonly use – words like ballasted roof membrane, and galvanized threaded pipe flange, deflection, breast wall – so most of us don't understand it. We might be interested in what it means, but we're scared off because we've never learned how to read a blueprint. And that's sad, because folks like Mac MacKay and those who design a building use this document to describe a vision of what might be if the blueprint is followed. Architects transform their dream into a blueprint, expecting that someone will study it, and understand it, and share it with others and finally build according to the design.

Architects create a blueprint for building a church building or, in our case, renovating an existing building, but this (holds up bible) is the blueprint for building a congregation and it too contains words and concepts not well known outside these walls and often not well known inside them as well. Let's not confuse the two over the months ahead. One crucial part of preparing for our future is to be found in our design session this morning. The other part is the ongoing work of creating a congregation for Christ.

So, what's the blueprint for a congregation? A logical place to start is at the beginning with the first church — the church at Jerusalem. It began on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled 120 believers who had gathered for a prayer meeting. To that number were added 3,000 later that same day. Those fledgling believers didn't know anything about building a church. They had no precedent; they didn't have a book on the church or church architecture or a blueprint of what the future might look like; they didn't even have the New Testament or any of the first letters written by the apostles. Somehow on that day a beginning was made and from such a small beginning has come the church that now encompasses 1/3 of humanity.



I was visiting one of our senior members and we began discussing the future of the congregation and he began to speak of the plans God has for us, plans that would see us not only survive but increasingly be about the work of Christ in our community. We probably spoke of this for over half an hour and by the time I left the blueprint for this message was in place. I was delighted for such guidance especially anticipating this day we are devoting to designing - in a very preliminary way - what is necessary to take us into the future. And more than any design we commit to blueprints is the vision of the ministry that we

envision and once there is a clear mission then what is necessary to accomplish such a mission and conduct such a ministry will be obvious. This congregation took those steps of discerning mission and ministry long before I arrived here and today we'll devote one of our tables to looking at space for our ministry and programming needs in the future.



When the church of Scotland presented its blueprint for a new future a few years ago, called '*A church without walls*', the committee reporting said that instead of reading the scores of pages of their report, the Committee was tempted to simply offer two words: "Follow Me". And the bottom line has always been, 'follow me'. And in this day and age we need to continually ask what it means to follow Jesus Christ and the only answer I can give is... get 'back to the Blueprint: Acts 2:42 gives the blueprint they followed: **"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."** Those are the vital elements that make up the actual function and life of the church — and all of that in just one verse!

Study, Community, Communion and Prayer.'

1 Corinthians 3 says: 'For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'

Here's an obvious starting point: A church built to God's plan will begin with the right raw material — and that is 'people'. Verse 41 identifies the church as being made up of "those who had received [Peter's] word," and "were continually devoting themselves." The church at Jerusalem was built on people who had heard and responded to the good news of Jesus Christ - those who adhered to a four-fold foundation for the church.

I wish I had time this morning to talk us through this blueprint but there will be opportunity to explore more of this foundation as we proceed. Let me just highlight for you six words from this blueprint for a congregation.

The first is **devotion**. The people devoted themselves to the project before them... this simply meaning they gave heart and soul for the dream to be realized – they were single-minded in what they saw as the most important thing in their lives, what had first call on their time, their talent and their treasure. Few projects succeed without the devotion of those who wish to see it to completion. As we take these first tentative steps in the process before us, let us devote ourselves to the task.

Four words are expressive of how to create a congregation.

The first is **study** of what is truly important to us... here it is called the apostles' teaching – the story of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and walking in the way as he taught us. Paul instructed Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

The second is **community**... the word is koinonia – “fellowship”, the entire community gathered together. This is the new community promised to those who saw in Jesus ‘the way, the truth and the life’ and who were determined to walk in this way. The first century world saw what they were doing and mocked them with words like: “See these Christians, how they love one another.” And indeed by this did they know we were Christians, as we showed love for one another and cared for one another. The early church was full of love — they “had all things in common” (v. 44). There was ownership in the early church – believers didn't live in a commune — but no one owned anything to the exclusion of someone who had a need. The Greek verbs in verse 46 translated “began selling” and “were sharing” show that they were continually selling and sharing their resources as needed. That kind of sacrificial love is the result of the Lord's work in obedient believers who follow God's blueprint.

The third is **communion** – sharing together at the deepest level possible. Sharing together our daily bread, sharing together our common faith, seeking communion with one another and seeking communion with Christ. It was in sharing bread and wine that the first Christians recognized Christ in one another and every time they gathered they broke bread and remembered that Jesus told them to do this in remembrance of him. The central focus of the early church's fellowship was the breaking of bread – a communion created when we sit together in remembrance of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. It was the most fitting symbol of their community since it reminded them of the basis for their unity. If you share those things as common ground with others, then the Lord's table – communion- is the most appropriate symbol of community.

This community found their common life strengthened through **prayer** - communicating their deepest love and concern to God. Any enterprise in the life of the church needs to be surrounded by prayer. It was our first act earlier this morning as we asked God to bless today and the design sessions and the attitude and comments of those who want to help make a difference.

If the church is to be built Christ's way, it will have all these aspects as part of its common life. The early Christians remembered Jesus' promise: "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it". As they demonstrated dependence on the Lord, the results were astounding.

What happens when we follow a blueprint based on Study, Community, Community and prayer? Acts 2:43 says, "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe." "Awe," - a sense of reverence. It is reserved for special times when people are struck with wonder because of something divine or powerful that defies human explanation.

Our church ought to be able to instil awe in our community. That first church certainly did. Verse 43 says everyone was in awe of them because "many wonders and signs were taking place..." And the greatest wonder for the world of today would be to see us acting as the church – a conduit to the study, community, communion and prayer that we believe are required for fullness of life promised in Jesus Christ.

Lots of 'things' seek to deflect us from our goal and mission. Especially now we need to remember that the main thing for us is to keep the main thing the main thing... nicely put by Jesus as seeking first the kingdom and righteousness with all else to follow.

If you want to make the most of your church, just follow the blueprint, and encourage your church leaders to do the same.

