**Vision Evening: Hope for the City.**

**Introduction**. Hope is in short supply in the world today. Hope for our future, for our children, hope for our prosperity, hope for our planet are all under threat. A sense of powerless to affect meaningful change grips many people, whether in relationships, economics, politics or the environment.

Against this backdrop we are called to bring hope, just as Jeremiah brought hope to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:11) hope for individuals and hope for a city. Churches are called to be change agents, and Woodlands Church we believe was called into being for the sake of a City. Our vision is for City transformation

1. **Why Cities?** (c.f.*Tim Keller writing in* ***Center Church.)***

Cities are where people are. Bristol is growing in population significantly faster than Church growth, reflecting the urbanisation of the planet. And in the City are all *kind*s of people that we want to reach.

*Young people* (people in their twenties make up over 20% of Bristol’s population), *poor people* (the poor gravitate to Cities), *creative people*, *influential people,* *ethnically diverse people* including people from ‘closed’ nations.

Cities influence the culture of a region or a nation. In our rapidly changing world we need to reach cities.

**What does a (western world) Church that reaches a city look like?**

1. A Church that embraces the challenge of cultural diversity.
2. A Church that integrates faith with lifestyle and work
3. A Church that can cope with rapid change
4. A church that has intense evangelism **and** is famous for its social care
5. A Church that has commitment to the arts
6. A church that has radical unity and co-operation with other Churches

In addition, it is a Church that has a commitment both to intellectual rigour *and* supernatural ministry.

**Question.** What aspects of city life and culture am I involved in? What would it look like for more of God’s presence in that place? What excites me about reaching the city and who am I inspired to reach?

1. **Our call. Find, Love, Follow, Serve.**

We are giving new language to an enduring vision, and using the memorable framework pioneered by Metro, of ‘Find, Love, Follow, Serve’ to give us both vision and process. We believe this language is generic across all our ministries, programmes and demographics. (e.g. we want our Children’s ministry to live out of these values and practices as much as our students, or say the Life Recovery group).

1. **Find**. Our Vision- is to make it easy for people to find faith. What does finding faith do for people? Why do we prioritise it? How are we going to make it easy for people to find faith this year?

I believe **our biggest obligation to our friends and neighbours is to give them an opportunity to find faith in Jesus Christ** and to teach them to follow him. He is their eternal hope, but also has the wisdom and power for them to be all that God created them to be now through the **transforming power** of the Holy Spirit. Our whole culture deeply Christianised as it has been, is under threat to other powers unless the nation is re-vitalised. We have a spiritual enemy who wants to spoil the image of God in people and subvert the rule of God on our planet.

How do we help people find faith and freedom?

We ***believe in building large visible Church as a massive signpost*** to Jesus and a huge doorway into his kingdom. We want a City Church that is visible enough for seekers to find, that can’t be ignore or hidden. We want this, not because we prefer large Church (many Christians prefer small family sized Church- more of this later) but because we exist for the sake of those who don’t yet belong.

On Vision evening Dan told his story of coming to Woodlands and finding faith. He wrote to me the next day saying he was one of the 90,000 people in their twenties in Bristol absent from Church. Now he wants to be one of those God uses to reach people.

Our **public worship** service, our on-line presence, our reputation in the City through so many individual stories are designed (through the participation of everyone) to create a context where seekers know where to go. Of course, we love it when members invite their unchurched friends. We hope and expect that Woodlands can be a resource to you in your own witness to friends, neighbours and colleagues. We want your feedback on how that works for you, how we can serve you ‘come and see’ evangelism! For example, our suite of **Christmas services** is designed so that there is something for everyone to use invitationally at the most open time of the year.

One of the keys to finding faith is ‘**positive surprise’**. We want to create a Church that in all its aspects exceeds people’s expectation (in its welcome, it’s size and vibrancy, its creativity etc) as it prophetically holds out a message of new life in Christ. We want to see **Holy Spirit ministry** as integral and powerful whenever we meet together.

We want to continue to **grow Alpha** as core part of Church life and indeed for some people to make Alpha team their ‘all year round’ pastorate and focus of fellowship and ministry.

We also want to **empower regular pastorates** and communities to design their own gatherings perfectly for the connections people in those groups want to reach. Bespoke Church or as St Paul puts it ‘all things to all men’!

Bristol has a higher than national average number **of young adults** in the city, and a lower than average number of young adults in Church. In addition, statistics tell us that only 1% of students are in Church, which fort Bristol with 50,000 students equates to 500 in the city! Those statistics have driven our vision to release **Woodlands Metro** to be a city centre, young adult and student orientated Church plant.

**Question.** What would make it easier for my connections to find faith? How can Woodlands serve that process?

1. **Love. Loving God and loving people go together.** It is incongruous to walk into a room where people seem to be loving God but you are not noticed or valued. We want to love God with all our heart but also our neighbour as ourselves, hence

* **Passionate worship** – this is an enduring value and practice at Woodlands. We will give time especially with pour music to express and stir up our love for God.
* **Noticing and welcoming** – yet we want to have an eye for those people who are new and who may not understand our insider language or practices. Everyone who comes to worship at Woodlands needs to embrace a call to ministry- to bring priestly worship to God, but to have a welcoming noticing eye for the stranger in our midst *( by the way newcomers tend to arrive at Church services early*). Welcome is not just for the designated teams but for everyone to participate in.
* **Connecting people into community** – Priority for midweek communities. Woodlands growth is out growing our midweek community life. We need more leaders to take responsibility for groups and pastorates, and doubtless some who have been called to lead have not yes said ‘yes’ to that call. Please come to **‘Leadership Boot camp’ on November 13th** if you are feeling the call!

How do we make it easy for people to connect with community? **Community is our ‘small church’**, meeting midweek. How do we connect that with Sundays? If we are committed to *worshipping* and noticing, we are all ministers. We note the importance of practicing hospitality, and the positive testimonies of individuals whose first visit to Woodlands led to an invitation for lunch that very Sunday.

Loving and reaching the City includes Church planting… (e.g. All Saints led by Zoe) *and neighbourhood* communities**. We need to plant Churches where they are most needed, like trees stopping erosion and providing shelter**

Woodlands **holds a Resource Church and Church planting model. Church planting at Woodlands is like a large family** with a large family home. As children grow they are empowered to manage their own bedroom (like a pastorate growing its ministry).. there comes a time when a child moves out of the family home, but they still carry the family DNA and come home for visits and are supported by the family through hard times and celebrate in the good. That’s how we like to do Church planting- one family, one Church, multiple sites.

I need to mention under **Love = inclusion** (Rosemary’s project to assess how inclusive we are for people with additional needs. Research is happening right now!)

**Question**

What is my experience of community at Woodlands? How could I contribute more to making loving community work? Who could I welcome into my community?

1. **Follow. The** Central Call of Jesus for His Church is to Make Disciples. Disciples imitate their master. What is our strategy?

* **Teaching**. Use our preaching and training programmes (including WTC, NWDY, RELEASE, Mullers, LDG, Prayer Ministry training, Prophetic team. N.B. Prophetic mentoring school which Liz Evans is beginning in 2018)
* **Going deeper from Sundays**. We hope that sermons are processed with our homegroup study questions and that we give ourselves homework to do as we try and apply teaching in midweek Church.
* **Imitation of Character** as well as ministry. We are called to holiness and the pendulum has rather swung to seeing imitation of Christ as practicing ‘supernatural ministry’ like healing the sick rather than growth in the fruit of the Spirit! We are of course ‘both and’!
* Do **small groups** really make disciples? How do we re energise these? Small groups can support and pastor. Do they challenge us? Do they model discipleship.
* **Intentionality** around the call to MAKE disciples. **Mentoring** is key in this. At Metro the process is ‘join a small group and then we will invest in you in mentoring’. Many of us want mentoring which is a good thing! How many of us are eager to find a mentee however? Jesus said make disciples, not find a mentor!
* **Wholeness**. Take the opportunity to put yourself under the spotlight in our wholeness course. Be open to the prophetic and prayer ministry.
* **Step up and step out.** Take the risk of talking about Jesus, offering to pray for a colleague, confessing a sin, taking a responsibility, giving generously, studying diligently, volunteering with vulnerable people.
* **Mission trips** and risk taking. Mission trips can be at home or abroad. They remind you that you are the minister in that situation!

**Question.** How am I growing in discipleship? What are the challenges and who is helping me? What risks do I need to take? Am I following? Am I called to lead?

1. **Serve.**  The implications of being a disciple is that we are to be on the master’s business. Woodlands has been raised up by God to be a resource Church to serve and transform City. There is a particular window of opportunity now for us, with a Christian mayor but bankrupt public services creating both a need and opportunity for action.

We follow a servant king. What does it look like for everyone to serve- inside and outside the Church? What are the priorities that God has? What are the priorities the Church has? What are the priorities the City has? What are the pathways this year?

* City Partnerships (61, food poverty programmes etc)
* Volunteering page on our website (<https://colse-leung-ry75.squarespace.com/volunteering>)
* Social action projects <https://woodlandschurch.net/social-action/>
* Hope 18. A major project for us this Easter is to partner with Soul

Survivor to bring 1,000 young people into the city and work with them to serve and witness to our communities. Our own Sam Cook is the project worker for this, and we hope that many will volunteer to engage with this project in the week after Easter Sunday

**Question**. What are my serving areas? How do I serve in Church? How do I serve the City?

**To Sum up**

U*nless the Lord builds the house we labour in vain*. In the grace of God Woodlands has been a spiritual hot spot in our city and had spiritual vitality for a generation. We don’t want to settle into being an institution. We want to have those movement dynamics that happen because the Holy Spirit is breathing, because the empowering wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing. This is not about working harder. It is about leaning into Him and seeking His presence, His blessing, His call, His power.