Special Agenda III - Private Member's Motion
Visual Media Resources

'That this Synod invite the Fresh Expressions team in consultation with the Liturgical Commission to produce an on-line library of visual and video resources for worship, so that hard-pressed local worship leaders may access and use them in both mission and congregational contexts.'

Background

In April 2009 I produced a 32 page highly produced document supporting this PMM. It was co-written with a young creative designer and explained in tantalising detail how what you are about to read could become reality. This however infringed business committee guidelines as it suggested to them that I might have some self-interest in designing, creating and delivering the end product we were suggesting. Nothing could be further from the truth. I, like many of you, have precious little time (or talent) to engage in creating visual media resources. Rather this document and motion argues clearly and loudly that a huge church like ours needs to have a joined up approach to funding our visual media. We need to take seriously the potential economies of scale.

Imagine...

Imagine a world where you could be proud of the assemblies your church was delivering. Imagine a world where youth resources didn't have to be stockpiled at conferences. Imagine those resources weren't dated and substandard. Imagine a world where your youth worker wasn't spending 12 salaried hours a week putting together Power Points. Imagine a world where your hard-developed ideas and creativity could be shared with others in an instant. Imagine you could get some funding for it. Imagine a world where people thought the Church of England was at the forefront of technology. Imagine a fresh-expression of national church. Imagine our visual media library.

Up and down the country in the past week ministers will have got out of bed, checked their diary, realised they were due at the local Primary or Secondary School, and with a PCC induced exhaustion hangover prayed, 'HELP' as hard as they have every prayed and gone off into what seems like a battle.

Still in bed in another part of the country is an equally frustrated creative, lacking the institutional inclination to go into full-time church ministry, but wondering when their video editing/ web development/ artistic gifts and design skills will be spotted by those who are and somehow put to good use.

With our visual media library comes the chance for harmony.

Our creative goes to bed at 3am as normal, having just uploaded his latest video on bullying and forgiveness to the visual media library.

At 7:30 our minister logs onto the visual media library. Searching for 'forgiveness' she comes across this contribution. Overjoyed she downloads it for £0.99 and is able to go back to Morning Prayer. There God shows her how to fit it in with the daily bible reading and the intimidating needs of Year 10.

At 9:10 the video is watched in stunned silence on the school's projection system. At 9:25 two quietly tearful teenagers approach her after the assembly asking for help. Two others tell no-one about the assembly, but conscience stricken, resolve inwardly to leave those girls alone.

At 11:00 our minister logs back onto the visual media library and leaves an encouraging message for our creative.

At midday he stirs, gets out of bed and flicks off the screen saver. Reading her message he bursts into tears. For the first time he is aware that the church values his creativity. By midnight he has made and posted two videos on encouragement.

And the cycle goes on!

What is the motion about?

This is a motion about communicating the gospel well in church and outside of church. It's about using new web-based technology to significantly enhance the Churches potential nationwide to engage with its missing generations via downloadable visual media.

This is a PMM that builds upon the economies of scale that we can gain nationally by providing a mechanism to pool creative talent and utilise new visual media effectively. Or to put that in vicar-speak - 'It'll make your assemblies less stressful and more relevant!'

The PMM includes a detailed proposal of what such a resource could look like and how it could be delivered. We've called it Visual media library. The great thing about the visual media library concept is that it relies on tried and tested processes that have been in place for about 5 years now, and where all the bugs have been ironed out. It's standardised, internationally accessible technology, and it's scaleable so we can start relatively small and scale it up as it grows.

It's not about fresh-expressions only, (and of course fresh-expressions are not mainly about worship style).

It's not about whether we should put projector screens in old churches.

It's not even about whether visual media are good for everyone, have been appropriately used, or overused.

It is about whether we can do what we already do with visual media a lot better.

It is about whether we can make visual media so accessible that any vicar / lay worker/ bishop who wants to, could use it in a variety of missional and worship contexts.

It is about using the creative gifts in the Church to their maximum effect

Why?

The vision for this web-based video resource came out of two things:

1) Frustration / inspiration in a Synod debate

2) Experiences in communication with Wolverhampton Pioneer Ministries.

During a debate where we were considering spending £15,000 writing 4 or 5 prayers a Synod

member mentioned the need for visual media to communicate to young people like her son. For me this was a serious kairos moment – a wake-up call from God – a heavenly YES we should make this happen, and something we can do on a national and Synod level that will tangibly help the local church.

Back in Wolverhampton we were finding that almost anything we put on the screen was helping both churched and 'unchurched' young adults connect with God. Whether watching a low budget version of John's Gospel, or worship videos with cheesy pictures of waterfalls in the background, it was obvious from their response that even low quality or home grown visual media was helping them engage.

At the same time a much higher quality of visual media was being produced globally with great effect. This was exemplified by Rob Bell's Nooma videos, some of the Hillsongs productions, the Alpha viral video 'More to Life', and even the home produced work of local ministers and communities like Liverpool based minister Richard Lyall (aka craftycurate).

In the meantime some fresh expression communities, youth workers and other ministers were beginning to spend long hours producing short videos and powerpoints for their worship. When used or reused at conferences they would be inundated by requests from less well-resourced churches for a copy. Those in the know would gather together like-minded friends to share some work (eg R.U.N.), but the vast majority of the Church would have little idea how to access this relatively small pool of work. Other technologically minded individuals would rip videos (of varying quality) off YouTube/GodTube(Tangle). But again the majority of the church would struggle to do this either technologically or ethically.

The tragic waste in all this, beyond even the lack of easily accessible resources, remained the lay Christian creatives up and down the country who remained disincentivised to use their God-given visual media talents. Lacking a way of distributing or marketing their work easily a creative could easily spend 5-20 hours on a video that would only be seen by a few score people. Worse still they may never have even made one at all. This could easily happen if they'd having never been asked or talent spotted, or if their church didn't use such media or if they were unaware of how such media could help their clergy outside Sunday worship eg in assemblies.

So ministers/ youth workers etc wanting to use visual media with their children/ young people/ adults remained stuck with a few options:
1.   Buy up a very limited range of visual media at conferences on DVDs in case they might be useful at a later date – generally an expensive option.
2.   Produce their own.
3.   File share with friends.
4.   Rip material off sites such as YouTube.
5.   If they were really in the know they could access the limited range of purchasable material on sites like Proost

What they couldn't do is get up one morning, search for a topic on a high quality site and access a range of excellent videos to download for a very cheap price.

How?

The technical considerations necessary were outlined in the original visual media library proposal. However there are many ways to skin a cat (if you'd want to) and it maybe that the great minds of the national church could come up with better ways than my friend and I. We were suggesting using tried and tested processes relying on standardised, internationally accessible technology. A scaleable approach means that we can start relatively small and scale it up as it grows.

Options the Synod might want to consider focusing on and supporting (perhaps via finely worded amendments!):

1) The whole hog: Employ 2 people, set up a stunning website, establish a great branding, commission an initial 100 videos, make this thing happen fast.
2) Research and Development: Assign certain parties within the church to do a detailed feasibility study and costing of this initiative. Ask them to report back within 12 months with the intention of asking the Archbishops Council to include it as a key ongoing budget item for the church.
3) Partner with an existing resource, providing finance to professionalise and promote something already going on.
4) The piglet: Establish a competition for home produced resources. Make DVDs of the best 50 videos. Market them through a publishing house/ distributor. If the take up is good repeat and slowly begin to develop a downloadable visual media library.
5) The wolf: decide that visual resources are not a key priority for the Church of England and continue to invest our money according to the current pattern.

But in this time of resource cutbacks the thing to remember is that some things work better bigger. As a percentage of our overall spending even option 1 would be insignificant. As a practitioner in the field this is something I know I need help in. The same is true for many of you, and vast numbers of your colleagues in the Dioceses. Done well it positions the Church of England as a leader in new technologies. Done well it increases the Church's attractiveness to young people & young adults. Done well it inspires missing generations back to church and into ministry. Done well it communicates Jesus in places where all else is failing to do so.

And isn't that worth doing well?

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