

Equipped to Serve

Ephesians 4:11–16

Rev Dr Deo Vistar
St Augustine's Anglican Church
Unley, South Australia

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
30 August 2026

There is a beautiful statement in *The Confessions*, the classic work written by St Augustine of Hippo: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'

The truth behind those words is something we can recognise. Human beings are constantly searching for something that will give life meaning, stability, purpose and hope. We look for it in success, money, relationships, pleasure, entertainment, experiences and possessions. And yet, again and again, people discover that even when they obtain the very things they thought would satisfy them, something is still missing.

C S Lewis made a similar observation. If we find within ourselves desires that nothing in this world can finally satisfy, perhaps it is because we were made for something beyond this world.

And I think we are seeing something of that search for meaning in our culture today.

This past week, at a clergy gathering that I attended, we were discussing the widely reported phenomenon of younger people – particularly young men – beginning to turn up in churches and explore the Christian faith. That is interesting because it challenges the assumption that younger generations are simply uninterested in God or religion. But perhaps we need to understand what is happening within a broader context.

Many people today are searching. They are searching for meaning and purpose. They are looking for stability in an increasingly uncertain world. They are seeking identity, community and hope. And when the things our secular culture offers do not finally satisfy the deeper longings of the human heart, people begin to look elsewhere. Some turn to Christianity. Some turn to different religions, spirituality, superstition, or all kinds of alternative beliefs and practices.

But what a wonderful opportunity this presents to the church. When people come searching – when they come with questions, doubts, hurts and longings – we want to be ready to welcome them. We want to be able to point them to Jesus Christ, because ultimately Christ is the one people need. In him there is forgiveness. In him there is reconciliation with God. In him there is life, purpose and hope. And so when people come searching, we need to be ready and willing to help them take steps towards Christ.

And that raises an important question for us as a church. Are we ready to help people who come searching? Are we growing as disciples of Christ ourselves? Are we equipped to serve? Are

we able to speak the truth of the gospel with love? Are we growing together into the kind of church through which Christ can minister to one another and to the world?

These are some of the questions that lie behind our reading this morning from Ephesians 4. Paul has a magnificent vision of the church. Throughout this letter, he reminds Christians of what God has done for them in Christ. God has chosen us in Christ. He has redeemed us through the blood of Christ. He has forgiven our sins. He has adopted us into his family. He has given us his Holy Spirit.

Paul also makes clear that through Christ, God is creating something new. The church is not simply a collection of religious individuals who happen to meet together on Sundays. The church is the new people of God. In Christ, God is bringing people who were once divided and separated and making them into one new humanity. We belong to Christ, and because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another.

That is why unity is such an important theme in Ephesians. And when we come to chapter 4, Paul turns from the unity of the church to the growth and maturity of the church. Listen again to verses 11 and 12:

‘And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.’

There is something very important here for us to understand. Christ gives spiritual leaders to his church. But why? Paul’s answer is not simply that the leaders are to do all the ministry while everybody else watches. The task of the spiritual leaders of the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And who are the saints? The saints are not a small group of especially holy Christians. In the New Testament the saints are God’s people – the believers, the members of Christ’s church.

So here is the picture Paul gives us: Christ gives spiritual leaders to the church so that the whole people of God may be equipped for ministry. That is a very important truth. The ministry of the church is not something carried out by the clergy or a small group of committed people, while everybody else remains on the sidelines. No. Christ equips his whole body, and each one of us has a part to play.

Some are called to teach. Some are called to encourage. Some to welcome. Some to care for others. Some to serve practically. Some to pray. Some to support the ministry of the church in ways that are seen; others in ways that are largely unseen. But the point is that the body grows as its members participate in the life and ministry to which Christ calls them.

And notice the purpose of all this. It is, Paul says, for ‘building up the body of Christ.’ The church is to grow. And that growth includes the hope that more will come to know and trust in Christ. We should desire that and pray and work towards that.

But Paul is speaking about more than numbers. The church is to grow in faith, to grow in knowledge, to grow in love, to grow in wisdom, to grow in Christian character, to grow in our ability to serve Christ and one another.

Paul says in verse 13 that we are to attain ‘the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,’ and to mature to manhood, ‘to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’ That is a remarkable vision. The goal of Christian growth is ultimately Christlikeness. The church is to grow up into Christ.

And Paul explains why this maturity matters. In verse 14, he says that we are not to remain like children, ‘tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.’ Christian maturity means that we are grounded in the truth, we know what we believe, we understand the gospel, we are able to recognise teaching that is false or misleading.

But notice that Paul does not present truth and love as alternatives. Sometimes we can be tempted to choose one or the other. We can say, ‘What matters is truth,’ and become harsh or unloving. Or we can say, ‘What matters is love,’ and become reluctant to speak the truth. But Paul gives us neither option.

In verse 15 he says: ‘Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.’ And then in verse 16 Paul gives us this beautiful picture of the church as the body of Christ: ‘From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.’

Notice those words: ‘When each part is working properly.’ The body grows as each part contributes. Every member has something to contribute.

Now I think that gives us a helpful biblical framework for what we are doing today. Today I am pleased to present to you our Mission Action Plan for 2026–2030.

But I want to say very clearly that this Plan is not the mission itself, nor is it simply a document for the Minister or the Parish Council to implement on behalf of everyone else. Christ has given his church its mission, and all of us are called to participate in that mission together. The Mission Action Plan is simply a practical tool to help us focus our efforts and pursue our mission more intentionally and effectively.

Over the past few months, through the contributions that many of you have made, four strategic priorities have emerged. They are:

First - to equip people in Christian faith and service. That speaks directly to what Paul says about equipping God’s people for the work of ministry.

Second - to nurture the next generation. If the church is to continue to grow and flourish in the years ahead, we must help children, young people and families come to know Christ and grow in faith.

Third - to engage with the community. We are called to bear witness to Christ and to serve the world to which he sends us.

And fourth - to provide adequate facilities and resources for ministry. Because if we are serious about the ministry God has entrusted to us, we also need to think responsibly about the practical resources that enable that ministry to take place.

These are our four strategic priorities. They are different aspects of helping our church become more faithful to the calling that Christ has given us.

Our Mission Action Plan is a working plan, covering the years from 2026 to 2030. We will need to return to this Plan regularly, to ask how we are progressing, what we are learning, what needs attention, and where God may be leading us.

As your Minister I have a particular responsibility to provide leadership and to help ensure that we move forward together. But Ephesians 4 reminds us that the ministry and mission of the church cannot rest upon one person, or even on a small group of people. The body grows, Paul says, when each part is working properly.

My prayer, therefore, is that this Plan will become something that belongs to all of us. That each of us will pray about it and ask: How might God be calling me to contribute? What can I do to help fulfil the mission God has entrusted to us as his church?

So I commend this Mission Action Plan to you for your prayerful and active participation.

May Christ, the head of the church, equip us for the work he has given us, and may he cause us to grow up in every way into him.

Amen.