

Our 4Fold Task: Moving Forward

by Jack De Vries



Key Indicators

Four years have passed since the Synod of 2006

decided to implement what is known as our fourfold task

(4FT). For the past thirty months I have met with pastors, church leaders, congregations, sessions, and classes throughout Australia promoting the 4FT and advancing these four priorities which the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) have identified as essential and strategic to fulfilling our Gospel calling. How are we doing both as individual congregations and collectively as a denomination? What are the key indicators that mark our progress in moving forward with the 4FT?



Overall there is widespread support for the **missional vision** to reach the lost for Christ. There is an understanding that we as churches need to fulfill the great commission to make disciples of all nations. This need is recognised on at least a couple of different levels. On the one hand, as a denomination resulting primarily from post World War II migration, we have plateaued since the early 1990's. We will move into further decline if we do not reach out with the gospel to our fellow

Australians. On the other hand, and more importantly, since we live in an increasingly secular society, it is imperative that we preach the good news of the kingdom to the millions within Australia who are outside the Christian community.

While there is widespread support for the missional vision to reach the lost for Christ, there is increasing tension on how this missional vision is to be implemented among our churches. The idea of "reforming" is

received with mixed reviews at all levels: pastors, sessions, churches, classes, and denomination. The idea of "reforming" indicates some level of change – and with a certain segment of the denomination there is resistance to change. Some of this resistance comes from those who fear that "reforming" includes an

erosion of the fundamental foundations of the Reformed faith upon which the CRCA was founded.

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And so there has been a push among some to more clearly define what it means to be Reformed and standardise the practises among member churches of the

CRCA. This is evidenced particularly with the conference held recently at the Box Hill congregation (24-26 April 2010), and



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accentuated by the report of this conference.¹ Some might like to dismiss the resolutions made at this conference in their entirety, but these voices will not go down in silence. They will need to be dealt with and this will be something that the CRCA will have to struggle with in the coming year(s) and Synod(s).

The priority of **prayer** is perhaps hard to gauge, yet there are indications that our churches are increasingly being filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in the world. For example, Grace CRC (WA) initiated monthly 24 hour prayer “vigils” where members sign up to pray for 30 minutes. This prayer ministry continues to grow with some 30 minute prayer slots being filled with 2 or 3 people praying. After a recent prayer conference sponsored by Grace church members became enthused about adopting a “Lighthouse Prayer Ministry”.² Another example is Bray Park Community Church (QLD). This past year they set aside an entire week of prayer encouraging the church to gather at various times for concerts of prayer. They continue to explore ways in which to make prayer a

priority, including having prayer gatherings before the morning worship.

A new initiative by the Church Planting Taskforce gives further evidence how prayer is becoming a priority in the CRCA. In the month prior to Pentecost a “Missions Prayer Calendar” was distributed to all the churches. Prayer points were solicited from a wide range of ministries and churches within the CRCA. This resulted in the entire denomination being focused in prayer for specific requests on specific days. While it is uncertain how much this prayer calendar was used, there were requests to make this a more regular occurrence.

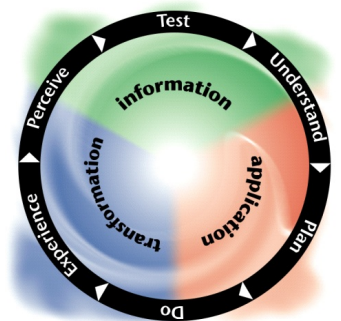
The goal of the second task, **multiply**, is ultimately to see local churches expand in numbers as well as to see the number of churches increase. The positive news is that since the 4FT task has been adopted the

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overall membership within the CRCA has decreased at a lower rate each year: 2006 (-173) 2007 (-143) 2008 (-50). The majority of growth is seen in the Queensland

and Tasmania states, while the largest decrease of membership is found in the New South Wales and Victoria states.

Healthy churches are multiplying churches and, therefore, a positive indication of progress in this second task is the number of churches which have engaged Natural Church Development (NCD). Ten(10) churches have completed the NCD survey and are implementing strategies to increase church health. The church planting taskforce has also insisted that all church plants receiving funding do the NCD survey on



¹To see the complete report go to:
<http://www.2010conference.info/sites/default/files/Conference%20Resolutions%20Booklet.pdf>

²For full explanation of a “Lighthouse Prayer Ministry” check out under prayer resources:
<http://ministryformation.com.au/resources/prayer/62-ll-about-lighthouses-.html>

an annual basis. All of this indicates that there is an increased commitment by the churches to become healthier.

The number of churches within the CRCA is increasing. When the 4FT was adopted there were 51 churches. Recently three church plants became organized, all in the Kingston(TAS) area: Margate One Way, The Bay, and Summerleas. In 2009 the Newcastle(NSW) congregation hired David Trounce as a full-time worker in Tanilba Bay to advance the gospel in that region. There are currently four churches being planted which are receiving denominational funds: the Wheatbelt Fellowship (WA); Huonville (TAS); Mansfield (QLD); and Port Sorell(TAS). In November 2009 the North Ryde congregation in Sydney began a new preaching post in the Castle Hill area, a western suburb of Sydney. The church planting taskforce is putting effort into seeing a church planted in Mackay. And there are a number of churches committed to planting churches using various models of multiplying churches. These churches include Bray Park (QLD), Redlands (QLD), Willeton (WA), and Gateway (WA). Before the next Synod (2012) there is the potential of adding more than 10 new churches within the CRCA, boosting our number of churches to 65 or more. The annual church planting offering will help to provide additional funds for church planting work.

An essential ingredient in the multiply task is its kingdom focus. Synod 2006 decided that the multiply priority meant also “to take further initiatives to create fellowships by penetrating structures of society with the gospel.” There are key indicators that this priority is becoming increasingly in focus. In a recent article Murray Capill wrote how gospel work is kingdom work: “For churches it means

we have to get our hands dirty in our communities. We have to get involved in the lives of the hurting, needy and broken. The kingdom is for them.”³ And this is happening more and more. Take for example what is happening at St. Marys CRC (NSW). They have taken their ministry to the streets. In a local park they reach out to the needy by providing food, clothing, and/or conversation.⁴ Another example is what Dandenong CRC(VIC) is doing at Shawlands Caravan Park. Each week they minister to the men, women, and children in this park, many who are doing life really tough. The gospel is being lived out; the kingdom of God has come near to these people.⁵ And there are a growing number of CRCA churches which are engaged in reaching out to the local state schools through programs such as Kids Hope, Religious

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The Shawlands Caravan Park where Dandenong CRC has an outreach.

Education Classes (RE), or chaplaincy programmes.

³ R.T.C. Monthly No. 41 (June 2010)

⁴ For the whole story go to: http://ministryformation.com.au/attachments/102_taking-ministry-to-the-streets.pdf

⁵ For the whole story go to: http://ministryformation.com.au/attachments/105_the-shawlands-caravan-park.pdf

Our mission statement reads that as a denomination our goal is *“to multiply Bible-based Christian fellowships and congregations which equip and nurture their members and grow throughout Australia and beyond.”*

This becomes the litmus test of how well the CRCA is implementing its overall vision. With this in mind, it is important to note how G.O.S.P.E.L. is enabling the CRCA to engage in church planting work in India. While this began as a dream of a few in the Launceston(TAS) region, the support of G.O.S.P.E.L. is increasing.⁶ Coupled with this church planting work are the ongoing denominational work of World Development and Relief headed by Bert Kuipers and the outreach to Solomon Islands overseen by Kevin and Machi Rietveld. In addition various churches are supporting other kingdom initiatives such as the New Life orphanage work in Burma or Hope Builders in Uganda. The kingdom of God is advancing throughout Australia and beyond.

Critical to the expanse of God’s kingdom is the multiplying of well-trained persons in gospel work. This is where the priority to **train** comes into focus. And if there is any area where we have made significant progress, it is in the area of training. This is due in large part to the work of the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Geelong in consultation with the previous vicariate committee (now called the Candidacy Committee) and the adoption of Task3.⁷ Task3 is a new pathway to ordained ministry in the CRCA. It brings

⁶ www.gospel.crca.org.au

⁷ For the full details of Task3 check out: http://www.rtc.vic.edu.au/rtc_co_Task3.php

together the two leading models of ministry training that have been used by the Christian church over the centuries: church-based,



Participants at the first Task3 - BILD training event at R.T.C.

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apprenticeship style training and on-campus theological college study. With Task3, coupled with the curriculum of BILD International, a larger number of persons are currently being trained (ordained, non-ordained, full time, part time, voluntary). At the moment there are about 20 people going through the BILD material (in Kingston, Gateway, South Barwon and Bray Park). There are two people who are formally enrolled in Task3, one in WA and one in Tasmania.

As a growing number of persons are being trained through the BILD curriculum and/or Task3, the Ministry Internship program continues to be offered by the Resource Centre.⁸ Currently there is only one person enrolled in this programme with the possibility of a couple more in the future. This training opportunity appears to be underutilised.

The training of gospel workers is not relegated only to Task3, RTC, and/or the

⁸ Check out the website: <http://www.internships.crca.org.au/>

Ministry Apprenticeship program. Throughout Australia a growing number of men and women are being trained for ministry in the church. For example, Clinton Berends, in his role on the CRCA Candidacy Committee, has identified twelve individuals in Classis Queensland alone who are at one stage or another being trained for ministry. God is at work in the lives of men and women preparing them for gospel work.

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After Synod 2009 the newly struck Training Workgroup, under the leadership of Leo Douma, is evaluating the entire discipleship and leadership development platforms within the CRCA. One of the areas to be explored is

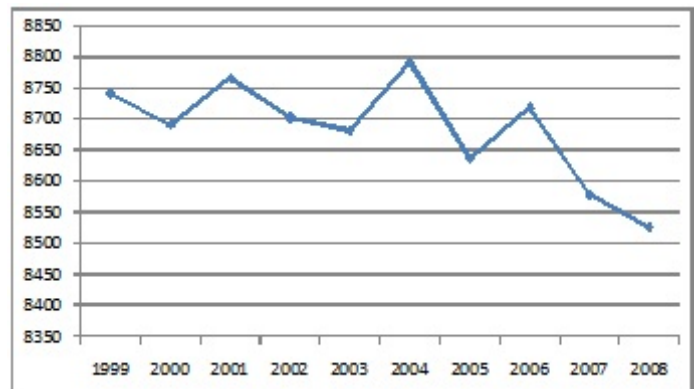
providing ongoing leadership training. The target group for this training is not limited to the ordained clergy, but all those who serve in ministry and/or leadership in our churches. This will be an important cog in the wheel as the CRCA moves forward to implement the priorities of the third task.

The **align** priority is the one area which needs critical attention if the CRCA is going to develop its effectiveness in ministry and mission. A positive development is the implementation of the Multiply and Train Workgroups. While some initial meetings have taken place, it will take most of the current triennium before Synod 2012 to carry out the goals adopted by Synod 2009.

The align task is also the area which seems to create the most angst within the denomination. There is a certain amount of

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resistance “to reform continually the life of the denomination.” I have already alluded to that above in reference to the Box Hill conference and the subsequent report. Yet this is exactly what needs to happen if the CRCA is ever to move forward with its missional vision. For too long, almost 20 years, the CRCA has plateaued and been remiss in reaching out with a gospel and kingdom focus. During that time the church



CRCA Statistics 1999-2008

has been riddled with factions on different sides of issues. We have seen that with the whole “Word and Spirit” discussion. There are ongoing debates about women in ministry, liturgy, and doctrinal purity. All the while these debates are going on we see numbers of our youth and young families leaving and little fruit in terms of conversion growth. It is

imperative that the CRCA remain doctrinally true to its theological foundations; but equally imperative must be its willingness to reform continually the life of the denomination. Otherwise as a denomination we will become irrelevant and ineffective to the world in which we live. As Professor

Elmer Towns reminds us: “When culture changes, adjust your methods or you will lose your effectiveness ...but never change your message or your principles! When methods no longer work, don’t blame the harvest as being unreachable; instead ask God if it is time to change your methods.”

Moving Forward

Synod 2006 reiterated God's vision for the church – to multiply, to make disciples of all nations, to be part of God's kingdom building enterprise in the world. What needs to happen before Synod 2012 in order for the CRCA to realise the goals it set out to achieve? While the following is not definitive, it is a launching pad for the kind of ongoing discussion that needs to take place.

Our vision buckets need to be refilled. As Bill Hybels reminds us: "Vision leaks!" In the busyness of everyday church life, pastors and people soon forget what we as a church and denomination are about. The important is replaced by the urgent. The vision of the CRCA, "A church reforming to reach the lost for Christ", needs to be passionately communicated and joyfully celebrated. In my movements throughout Australia, through the Ministry Formation website, and other printed media, the priorities of the 4FT ought to be accented. As we near Synod 2012 this vision ought to be revisited and adjustments made to move us beyond 2012.

The work of church planting needs to be resourced. The harvest is plentiful and through the train priority the number of harvest workers is increasing. The opportunities and need for church plants is legion. A key element of the plan adopted by Synod 2006 is resourcing: "Congregational members be encouraged to increment their financial giving by 1% of their

total income every year to a target level of not less than 10% within 10 years." Little emphasis has been given to this initiative. This is part of the Ministry Formation Workgroup's (MFW) mandate and a strategy should be designed to implement this initiative. This is especially critical if the CRCA decides to expand our church planting efforts through G.O.S.P.E.L. or our



kingdom work through New Life, Hope Builders, the Solomon Islands, or other mission opportunities.

The work of church planting in Australia has been blessed by the emergence of partnerships such as Vision 100 and The Geneva Push. Synod 2006 decided that "congregations be encouraged to form team ministries, share resources with neighbouring local churches, and utilise specialists to cover needs in several congregations." Rather than "reinventing the wheel" the CRCA should be promoting and utilising these specialists in church planting.

The Multiply and Train Workgroups have begun meeting and the progress of these two workgroups ought to be monitored. This is particularly true for the Train Workgroup. There are key strategies in this platform which need to be designed and implemented. It would be beneficial to keep the denomination informed as to

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The CRCA website needs to promote unity around our adopted vision, mission, core values, and strategies.

Things such as our church ethos, customs, and church order need to be continually reformed.

Training pathways in the CRCA need to be merged into a common direction.

the progress of these workgroups.

While alignment might be happening in the multiply and train priorities, there is more work to be done in other areas of denominational life. For example, the denominational website continues to advance the polarity within the denomination rather than promote unity around our adopted vision, mission, core values, and strategies. This is evidenced by the blogs on the home page and the promotion of the Box Hill Conference website and reports. The website is not geared to encouraging and enabling the fulfilment of the fundamental aim of reaching the lost for Christ.

The denominational website is not the only area which needs to be reviewed. If the CRCA is going to be effective in reaching the culture things such as our church ethos, customs, and church order need to be continually reformed. This is only accentuated by the feedback from the Box Hill Conference report. For some these areas might be non-negotiable, but at the very least there needs to be a discussion of these matters, and some work done before next Synod to address these areas of reform.

The Task3 and BILD curriculum is gaining momentum and the CRCA should leverage this to maximise the raising up of gospel workers. In discussions with the Training Workgroup (including our Youth Committee and Candidacy Committee) there should be some confluence of training paths in the CRCA. Instead of RTC, BILD, Task3, Ministry Apprenticeships, and/or other training paths going in parallel or in opposing directions, the Training Workgroup should seek ways to merge them in a common direction.

As Synod 2006 declared, the priorities of the 4FT are not intended to replace or devalue the many good and important ministry areas and contexts already underway in the CRCA. But as we move forward, we

need to keep asking: "How can we better fulfil the calling God has given us?" The work of intentional ministry formation continues to move forward. I have given some thoughts what that might look like. As we call upon God in prayer, may He continue to give us wisdom and direction. To Him be all the glory!

Our Vision

To be a church reforming to reach the lost for Christ.

Our Mission

To multiply Bible-based Christian fellowships and congregations which equip and nurture

their members and grow throughout Australia and beyond.

Our Fourfold Task

In submission to the Lord Jesus Christ and his command to make disciples of all nations:

1 To call upon God for such an outpouring of his Spirit that his people will be assured of his love through his Word, seek to please the Saviour in all things, manifest the godly life and be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world.

2 To enable local churches to expand numerically, equip and nurture their members, and become the mother-churches of as many fellowships and congregations as possible; and also to take further initiatives to create fellowships by penetrating structures of society with the gospel.

3 To multiply the number of well-trained persons (ordained, non-ordained, full time, part time, voluntary) lovingly dedicated to the creation and development of such fellowships and congregations by proclaiming the gospel.

4 To reform continually the life of the denomination (including our church ethos, customs, church order, use of resources, denominational committees, support staff and agencies) to encourage and enable the fulfilment of the fundamental aim.