

Restoring a Mission Ministry

Introduction

In this paper the church leaders of Gateway Community Church, Cockburn Central, WA, sought to clarify for their congregation what God's word (and particularly the book of Acts) teaches about mission as well as outline what they believed they needed to do in the light of this. A study of the book of Acts clearly shows that the whole church was involved in the task of mission and discipleship. Reflecting on the ministry of their church it became clear that they needed to restore a mission ministry at Gateway. Since the church is central to the work of mission, the church leaders presented this paper so that as a church community they could pray, think about these issues and move forward together in unity toward what the Lord would have them do.



This report was also presented to and discussed at the November meeting of Classis Western Australia. Classis went on to support Gateway's proposal.

Restoring a mission ministry to the church

Jesus showed us what mission involves. He summarized it in his own mission statement in Luke 4:18-19; preaching the good news, proclaiming freedom and releasing the oppressed. Jesus passed on this gospel

mission to the church in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).

In the book of Acts we see the church fulfilling the Great Commission. It is possible to fall into the wrong assumption that it was the apostles only who fulfilled this mission as they preached the gospel. Yet a close study of Acts reveals that the local church was central to this task.

Acts 11:19-26 we see *ordinary believers* "telling the message" and speaking to their neighbours about Christ with the result of a great number of people believing. In Acts 13:1-3 we read that it was through the church that the Lord commissioned and sent forth his appointed missionaries, Barnabas and Paul.

"the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2 NIV)

And it was the local church who received Paul and Barnabas on their return from mission in order that they might report all that the Lord had done (see Acts 14:27-28).

The local church released their most mature gifted leaders to the missionary task. They supported the mission through prayer, finance and sending trainee leaders¹ to

¹ Practically the commission was fulfilled not just by Paul. He also took with him young emerging leaders

accompany the apostles. The local church played a key role in the work of mission by reaching out to neighbours and friends with the good news of Christ, but they also provided a loving community where new believers were baptised, nurtured, equipped in sound doctrine as well as the principles of Christian living and service (Acts 2:42- 47). The church therefore is central to mission.

The early church balanced the twin gospel responsibilities of sharing the gospel through strategic mission to the unsaved and discipling the church through teaching and preaching. We see the Spirit of Christ growing the church through this.

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:21 NIV)

The task of restoring mission to the centre of the churches ministry however involves more than running a program. It involves a commitment to proclaim the gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection uncompromisingly, but it also requires a willingness to present that message in a relevant way to today's culture. While Paul was uncompromising about the message he was willing to adapt his methods in order to create no barrier except the gospel itself. In fact Paul was prepared to go to great lengths to be culturally sensitive to the people he was reaching in order to proclaim the gospel; (16:3) administering circumcision², (18:18)

such as Luke (Acts 16:10), John Mark (Acts 13:5), Timothy (Acts 16:1), Silas (Acts 17:10) and Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18) who assisted him planting and establishing churches.

² Timothy would have been considered a Jew (as his mother was a Jew). His father, however, being a Greek, would not have had his son circumcised; and the local Jews were aware of this (v. 3). Thus Paul had Timothy circumcised. Paul always worked through the Jewish synagogues where possible. To have had a member of his entourage be of Jewish lineage and yet uncircumcised would have hampered his effectiveness among the Jews. It was at the very least a matter of

shaving his head³, (Acts 21:26) and undergoing purification.

In summary then, the early church ministry held together the twin tasks of mission and discipleship; taking the gospel to the world and establishing existing disciples in the faith.



Cockburn Central is one of the most innovative new urban developments seen in Western Australia. When complete the regional centre will serve a surrounding population of about 190,000 people.

missionary strategy to circumcise Timothy (1 Cor 9:20). (New American Commentary: Acts)

³ In his mission to the Gentiles, he did not abandon his own Jewishness. He was still a "Jew to the Jews" and still continued his witness in the synagogues. Interestingly, on Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, when James wanted him to demonstrate his Jewish loyalty before the more legally zealous Jewish Christians, participation in a similar vow was chosen as the means to accomplish this (21:20-24). (New American Commentary: Acts)

Reviewing our ministry focus at Gateway

A review of current ministry reveals that our overwhelming focus is on teaching and establishing believers in the faith. This is the important ministry of equipping existing disciples. This vital task is being carried out by preaching, teaching groups such as Sunday school, catechism and kid's for Christ and small groups. Key leaders are being trained, mentored and coached in the work of ministry to the church. This work is crucial and must continue.



Gateway Community Church is strategically located near the CBD of Cockburn Central.

However when it comes to intentional gospel mission and witness our efforts as a church are small. This mission work has been done sporadically in the past and present, through the running of various types of ministries such as: parenting courses ("on becoming childwise"), Carols in the park, Christianity Explained, Alpha, Evangelism Explosion, Christian devotions at Oasis Craft group, or mission trips by Target 21 Youth leadership and mission training.

The Lord has blessed these ministries and a number of people were brought to faith through them. The problem has been however that this mission ministry was undertaken by a few and not regarded as a central ministry of the church. As a result when discipleship needs escalated, outreach ministry stopped. Without a dedicated mission ministry the harvest of new people coming to Christ also stopped.

In order for the church to return to the pattern of the New Testament we must change what we are doing now to embrace a

new model of ministry that includes at its very heart the work of mission and gospel witness to the world.

One area that church council believes we must change is our evening service. Even though this service has been a blessing for the few that have attended it, the evening service continues to receive sporadic attendance and

dwindling numbers. Quite a lot of time and energy is being spent on preparation of messages, song selection, musical accompaniment, sound and overhead projection with a limited kingdom impact. In recent years the music ministry team has contracted and therefore this load falls increasingly on a few. We believe that strategically we must be good stewards of our limited people resources and that this effort would be far better directed to fulfilling the Great Commission, taking the gospel to our wider community.

By ceasing the formal evening service this can open up opportunities for a host of other outreach alternatives. Small groups could meet for prayer and planning about how to reach neighbours and friends. Meals could be organised with neighbours in order to build real friendships that we might share the love of Christ. It may be possible to run short term courses outlining how God's word applies to parenting or other issues.

Alternatively small groups may choose to use Sunday evening as a time to meet for

fellowship and Scripture study. For example, the young adults "Cross reference" ministry has reviewed its mid week meeting time. More young people are finding it harder to make a mid week ministry due to work requiring them to stay later and work longer. In reviewing the best time slot for their ministry most agreed that a Sunday evening time slot would be more suitable with up to 20 young people being available to attend. This in turn may create a less threatening environment to invite non Christian friends and neighbours.

Renewing a mission strategy

What lies ahead of us is an opportunity to restructure ministry to more fully reflect Christ's commission and the call to mission. For this work to be successful there are a number of things that must take place:

1. We must prayerfully seek and rely on the empowerment of Christ's Spirit.
2. We must be founded on the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.
3. We must understand that the responsibility of mission does not belong to a few but to us all; the church.

How do we develop a mission strategy?

Broadly we will need to do the following:

- Gain a thorough understanding of the people we are seeking to reach.⁴

⁴ The apostle Paul did this in order that he could clearly communicate the gospel to them:

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. Acts 17:22-23 (NIV)

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one

- Develop a gospel proclamation ministry that is culturally relevant and will answer the questions our wider community is asking.
- Establish a strategy for establishing new believers in the faith.⁵
- Recruit and train leaders to teach and disciple new believers and gather them into communities of faith.
- Prayerfully seek and await God's timing for the future planting of new church communities and fellowships.



Cockburn Central is a convenient 16-minute train ride from Perth CBD.

Currently Pastor Peter and a number of leaders are working through the book of Acts using course material prepared by Bild. The final project of the course is to design a mission's strategy for local churches. The goal will be to create a plan that is in harmony as

not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NIV)

⁵ The "First Principles" Bild material will be central in this.

much as possible with what was learnt through studying the book of Acts.

Exactly what our heavenly Father is calling us to do with regard to mission is not yet fully clear. However we believe that our Lord is calling us to pray and work toward this with the above goals in mind. What we believe the Lord calling us to do is to pray, think through, discuss and prepare for a mission work that will enable us to present the gospel in a relevant way to our non churched friends and neighbours in 2010.

Conclusion

So where to from here? We urge you to pray that the Lord will guide us into an effective mission ministry. To achieve this we will need to think creatively together about how to reach our friends with the good news of Christ. But we need more than thinking, Christ's commission requires of us all that we ask ourselves how we can be involved with the work. The work of mission is for the local church and there will be much preparation and sacrifice ahead to accomplish it.

For this reason Church council is proposing that we continue our evening service to the end of November and that evening services cease completely the first week of December 2009. From that point the work of prayer and planning for a mission ministry will begin for 2010 and beyond.

Please prayerfully think about the issues raised in this paper, discuss it with the elders and in your home group or fellowship group.

We propose to keep this discussion going, so that together as a whole church community we will develop a mission strategy and begin to work together to restore a mission ministry at Gateway.

Church council
Gateway Community Church.