

Notes from the Melbourne `Growing Churches Together
John Henderson – Background
Paul Cameron – `letting the text read us', Matthew 13: 31,32

Kingsley Nowell–

Explained the purpose of the day, to explore together the ongoing mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in Australia.

Focus Question: what do growing Australian churches look like?

Shared Understandings:

Differences – respect, embrace, celebrate

Participation – equal, interactive, inclusive, confidentiality

Conversation – monologue, debate, dialogue

Personal Interactions

What first came to mind when you saw the topic – what did you hear?

We are here because we are part of the desired outcome (the desired outcome is our start), love of knowledge, hearing the journeys of others, the challenge of limited resources, wanting positive outcomes, the sense of `explore', a commitment to relationships rather than programs, a desire to learn, the importance of sharing, the desire to work together – interdenominationally (on the issue), the lonely road, the Australian scene is not the same as overseas,

Any surprises? – *no response*

Anything got you thinking?

- The lonely road response.
- The word `explore' and what it might mean to the focus of the day,
- the use of the idea of `aussie scenes' – the (usual) history of our churches and e.g. those who are arriving from Africa
- the reminder that our aussie scene is one of brokenness (remembering the churches contacts with Indigenous populations, the missions etc)
- The question of `what we desire' and our `how we behave'
- Is it possible to create relationships without creating programs (and the fact that we have this organised meeting without being in relationships)
- How do we relate to each other when we don't really know where we are coming from e.g. some of those present work widely in this missional area and yet knew very few in the room.

So – what brought us into this room?

- I was in ministry for 28 years and resigned – the `house burnt down' and I realised I had had no help. Two things I learnt – that while most things don't matter, I learnt I needed a coach, and that I wanted to be a facilitator to help others working in this area;
- I have a passion, and have been working in this area – 2 important things – people and places. Need to keep our feet on the ground – one body, one Christ;
- Involved in an outreach, and appreciate being here to see what I learn;
- Passion for the mission and ministry of Christ in the city of Melbourne, from a church that in Australia is not ecumenical – but wants to live out the reminder from Jesus that `leave the one working, even if not part of our group';

- My job – but from parish and pastoral background – still surprised at how much we all ‘go it alone’ – we don’t care for each other, we compete (either between traditions, or within our traditions). We find it easier to work with people who think like us;
- My job and I got the invitation and looking forward to learning;
- My job – mission and outreach for the Catholic church, also want to see what the day will mean for my work and role in the VCCs Commission. on Mission;
- My Bishop told me to come – and we need to learn more of the Australian context. Also a Pastor in the Docklands – and wonder why we can’t work more collaboratively for ‘Christ’s mission’. We also want to be more involved in Indigenous ministry and want to bring people to Christ;
- Part of ‘growing churches’ across Melbourne and would like to bring more networks into the discussion – how to relate the Gospel to the Australian context;
- In the room because I believe we can learn so much from each other – and have more of an impact on our community. Love out community and want to see people saved;
- My job is to develop, support and equip church leaders – interested to see what ‘angle’ this day will take. Reading material from overseas, need to localise and/or indigenise, the task of mission;
- Here because of loyalty to the NCCA, interested to see how the day unfolds. Wanting to see what ‘mission’ means within this group. We have limited resources – hoping the day will provide resources;
- Not representing the church (following the mention that the Heads of Churches had been invited, only 1 in attendance although others being represented – also a late apology because of sickness). Very committed to seeing people in personal relationship with Jesus Christ – so not sure of those present are ‘missioners’ not in leadership role.

There was then an interesting discussion on church leadership, their presence (and absence) and how important mission is to the leadership of the church.

What did you hear? – that the conversation is important, that time is valuable so we need to get to work...

Where do you see Jesus Christ in your world (mission and ministry), and what is happening there?

Key messages:

- Jesus’ ministry through the Word in communities of the gathered people;
- Therefore ministry in structured ways but also in the everyday lives (unstructured) of the people;
- So in churches even where there is not the structured welfare programs, care of the poor and needy continues;
- In the holy/ unholy (ordinary, common) – so the holy is seen in the actions of care (no matter by whom);
- Ministry across cultures – so sometimes looks different in multicultural Australia, also people coming and going overseas;

- In world which is wealthy and a growing middle class, there is self-sufficiency so increasing ministry possible mainly when people are facing their own mortality e.g. ageing, with the sick;
- Also in cities the increasing ministry with students, and the joy of seeing lives changed and people growing in the faith, i.e. Christ at work in the transitional changes of life;
- Education – in schools and at home, churches traditionally being ‘in education’ – increasing understanding of ‘home’ values and teaching;
- Chaplains – in business i.e. Christian ministry in places which are ‘not church’, prison ministry, noting the increased role/ expressed need for practical engagement by the churches e.g. in chaplaincies;
- How do we support our young people as they move out from our structured church life (hopefully only for a period);
- Jesus’ ministry in places where (normally) we would not choose to go i.e. with the marginalised.

What do growing (healthy) churches look like?

Discussion:

- is this a theoretical or practical question – one thing to look at practical examples of growing churches and discuss how they got that way and the theoretical expression of the original theme for the day;
- so – “In your experience what do healthy growing Australian churches look like?”
- the initiatives might be quite small – but be healthy
- is the question the growing? or the Australian context?
- A great deal of discussion on the meaning of the question –
 - Appreciation of the broadening of the understanding so that the emphasis is on what does the growing church in the Australian context look like (i.e. the focus is on the current church),
 - or what would a growing church in Australia look like i.e. could be Chinese;
 - what does healthy Christian ministry look like i.e. is ‘church’ too concrete? What is our understanding of missiology?
- Remember - Ecclesia – the gathering, not the institutional structure
- Does the question distract us from the topic – noting that many of these questions have been discussed by the Committee who thought they had a shared understanding. Nb. Each gathering will be with a different people so need space to learn of each other and information on the expected process (outcome?). (*MY question: is some of this in the background information provided, and if so, need to remind people of the material received and revisit as a group together?*).
- SO DISCUSS A STATEMENT: GROWING CHURCHES IN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT – how do we see this happening? what does that mean to you?

Process described – with people encouraged to try and identify a ‘church tradition’ and/or a ‘personal’ response – each person individually card-writing.

Responses from cards – at first just received, the following listing after being allocated under headings:

Connections:

Functional Structures and Communication;

- A functional structure that supports existing congregations and encourages them (mother/daughter),
- Bridge the Gap between school and church life (Catholic),
- Self supporting,

Harness Ecumenism;

- Being one in Christ, incarnating difference,
- Local church and wider church (Catholic),
- Journey with ecumenism,

New Forms of Doing Church;

- Non-Sunday church
- Simplifying church – simple `house` (personal),
- Emerging church
- Put church back on the path of family life (personal),

Flexible Points of presence;

- Multi-congregational services
- multi-campus congregations,
- multiplying of congregations (both within and without), (SA),

Creative Thinking;

- a new core of creativity in the margin in between,
- multiple and diverse faith groups,
- reach back, reach out, reflect,

Public face/ Image of the church;

- Practical level – keep the websites up-to-date,
- Active engagement with the community (Presbyterian)
 - Welfare ministries
 - Chaplaincy in schools, business etc
 - Marketing – raise profile to let people know we are here
 - Diversified ministries – ethnic/ language, student/youth

Word of God central;

- The Word of God and sound doctrine taught and lived – the church might grow without it, but the growth will not be healthy; a healthy church with sound teaching might not demonstrate visible growth, (Presbyterian),
- A place where the Gospel and Sacraments are central and offered in a culturally engaging /relevant way (Lutheran),
- Train Lay people to read, understand and apply the Word of God to their lives and the lives of others around them, (Lutheran),
- Vibrant, Liturgical, Sacramental life (Catholic),
- Grow people in obedient discipleship to Christ, led by the Holy Spirit (Lutheran),

Mercy and Justice;

- ministry to the poor and marginalised (SA),
- Minister on the margins (Catholic),
- Engagement in practical mission,
- A Christian expression that shows a balance of faith, justice and mercy,
- Influence in the community (RSF),
- Meet people where they are listening,

- Involvement in support of social justice and peace activism from leaders,

Active Discipleship;

- practise inclusive loving service to networks of relationships and build relationships in which to share the Gospel (Lutheran),
- equip believers to be ministers in everyday environments (personal),
- making disciples,
- hospitality and outreach (Catholic),
- ongoing engagement in/ out (Catholic),
- a place which engages individuals effectively, has good pastoral care and open doors (Lutheran),
- small group spirituality (Catholic),
- share personal testimonies/ stories,

Relevant evangelism;

- The Gospel of Salvation in Jesus Christ, with sins confessed and forgiven –
 - true growth happens when a sinner is saved, (Presbyterian)
 - engender a desire to multiply
 - personal evangelism
 - public evangelism,
- people equipped to speak the faith into today's culture,
- relevant presentation of the Gospel,

Plan for Generational Change;

- hand 'church' to next generations,
- understanding Generation Y's needs and wants,

Christ in the home;

- parents equipped and active every day to bring up their children in the faith,
- equip and support people for mission and ministry in their households and local communities (Lutheran),

Intentional Mission Planning;

- identify clear and empowering mission and ministry plans and goals for healthy Christian community (Lutheran),
- each community with a specific mission plan/ project (Lutheran),
- casting of vision,

Embrace Difference;

- cross cultural, multicultural, (Catholic),
- cross cultural (inclusive), interaction,
- culturally relevant worship – language, music style, building appropriate context/target, preaching style and context – alternative forms of proclamation? (Presbyterian),
- understanding of cross cultural beliefs in defining ministries,
- an open door for specific support of refugees and migrants coming here,
- multicultural services,
- connected to multicultural ethnic groups,

Trained Leaders;

- recruit, train, equip, resource and support effective leadership (Lutheran),
- raising up more effective Godly leaders,
- well-trained leaders who serve in the unity and love of Christ (Lutheran),
- quality vs. quantity (Catholic),
- train and resource effective ministry teams (Lutheran).

Desired Outcome: the realization that there is a valid, ongoing mission and ministry of Jesus Christ and we are all part of it

At. 3.10 p.m. the group said the outcome has been:

- **Practical suggestions for a healthy church in Australia,**
- **Not enough work on the Australian context – but the group has spoken as Australians working in the area of ministry**
- **Card process was useful**
- **People are encouraged to send back further comments, appraisal of the day etc., advise their church leadership of the event and the beginning of the process.**

What did people get from the day?

- **explore**
- **personal contacts and learning from each other**
- **concrete record of the day should enhance work and ongoing discussions.**

Task – ‘Where do you see the ministry of Christ?’ or ‘Where do you see Jesus at work?’

Material from the large table sheets:

Table 1:

- **not so much happens on Sunday, but in the lives of people who are involved in the day to day ministry of Jesus,**
- **see it happening everywhere. Hard to define!**
- **See it in the organised events in a structure that enables a community to move forward**
- **See it when I see a child baptised. See it in the lives of Christian people as they do holy things and things in the everyday. See it in the lives of people who serve each other**
- **See it in the local active ministry of the clergy as well as those who support them,**
- **See it in the lives of young people who have a passion for Christ – and those who don’t!**
- **Local Parish work,**
- **Melbourne ethnic evangelism network – very active**
- **Next1000 – another network, Where Jesus is active**
- **See the ministry of Jesus as people who listen and respond to the Word of God proclaimed and in fellowship and care of the gathered people of God,**
- **Among those with very poor/ marginal resources and life - seeking home in structures services/ church.**

Table 2:

- **hard to see Jesus in Church leadership but see Jesus in - people we work with in their resilience to survive against odds when all are struggling, global presence across the world, Spirit of Jesus at work in our children,**
- **Jesus present in gathered community,**

- Ministry from within people – spoken reference to experience of each individual, following leadership of Jesus, speaking with people and hearing their experience, silence, being where people are at, Jesus seen in non-violence and brought to challenging areas,
- ACTIVE – Jesus Word, Spirit, Faith – the Word spoken, enacted, heard, the gathering of God’s people in action, people in world living out their relationship with Christ,
- Global spirituality and allegiances, Spirit working within people – caring, clarity of mission, personal testimonies shared with non-believers, linguistic challenge, ‘training station’ for non believers to go back to their home countries (Asian), transform disciples, Christian leaders.

Table 3:

- work of Chaplains,
- international student ministry
- youth ministry
- multicultural ministry,
- applying the values/ teachings of Jesus to stress and strains of living ‘the Australian dream’,
- there are those who walk with Jesus today e.g. church administrators, priests, religious sisters, youth ministry personnel – and they help us work for justice on a number of issues e.g. Burma/refugees, Timor Leste, Africa, trafficking in women, prison ministry;
- developing relationships with the marginalised.

Task: respond to the question -

Where do we see the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in our world?

- the people who ‘walk the walk’, living on the edge to reach the marginalised,
- the work of Chaplains,
- work/ ministry with International students,
- youth work that sees lives changed,
- effective multicultural ministry – where people encounter Jesus
- people helping others, applying the values of Jesus in relation to stresses of life,
- ministry – spirit centred (caring, teaching), Asian, African (inevitably global), Christ within each,
- issue of outside influence/ leadership,
- clear difference can become a barrier,
- importance of the Word (the starting point),
- engagement – people to people,
- multicultural environment,
- education (school and family)
- coming in/ going out to/ from church (people’s personal journeys),
- see it everywhere, in the everyday, in the holy and unholy, in the structure (fellowship of believers, proclamation of the Word) and in the freedom that finds Christ.

Melbourne, April 18th, 2008