



CONGREGATIONAL MISSION

PART 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions

Congregational Mission

Part 1 – Community Engagement

by Rev Gayle Hill and Rev Jono Ingram

so, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Luke 10:29b

Jono Ingram and I (Gayle Hill) both moved back to Melbourne after living for a significant period in the country and/or regional town. Community and neighbourhood are the essential fabric of life in the country. You cannot go to the local shops without taking another half hour to chat to someone you know. For both of us, relocating to the city revealed challenges as we sought to participate with God in creating the same kind of community engagement (or neighbourliness, because everyone can be a dedicated neighbour), despite people’s seemingly independent and indifferent manner. The starting place for this is the following:

1. A passion for God
2. A passion for People
3. A passion for Place (where God has planted you)

It is in likelihood, these three simple but profound areas are marks for all followers of Jesus.

Gayle:

For Warren and I, our inner city neighbourhood of Carlton is a strange mix of people. There are three distinct demographics and none of these integrate, and all but one is reasonably transient. It has the highest number of students (we have three universities within the suburb), young professionals who predominantly rent, and the highest number of people in social housing for an inner urban suburb.

We moved into Carlton ten years ago and have since built developing friendships with neighbours in our street. Paul Sparks¹ describes it as “becoming a known character in your neighbourhood”. Sharing meals together, going to the Nova for movies and bike riding and supporting one another when there are issues has become part of the rhythm of our lives, and even deepened during COVID. Warren and I also commenced an intentional work in the social housing precinct just around the corner four years ago. This was a gift from God, and we now have a faith community established with an Afterschool Families program as well as food bank, support etc. We have become “known characters” in this distinct community. I really believe it is a matter of having a prayerful heart and deep love for where God has planted you and following the Spirit’s lead.

Jono:

My family's new neighbourhood of Aintree is a growing, multicultural, suburban housing development in Melbourne's north west. It is one of Melbourne's fastest growing communities with many people building their "dream home" and looking for a good neighbourhood to raise their family. It is also probably the most religious place I have ever lived, however the proportion of Christianity in that mix is very low.

Likewise, in Aintree, I have built relationships in the neighbourhood through sporting clubs, running community events & community programs, and inviting new friends over for meals at our home. We have even cut a hole in our fence and installed a gate so our family and our neighbours, particularly our kids, can freely and frequently visit on another. We have discovered that despite having different world views to many of our neighbours, we often yearn for similar things — connection, belonging, acceptance, and a place where we can do things we enjoy alongside others.

Cameron Harder tells the story of coming back to Kolkata in India after twelve months away. The neighbourhood was depressed but it had been transformed in this short period of time. When he asked how this had happened, the answer one woman gave was, "the best thing is that we found each other". Finding "each other" is a spiritual practice because community engagement or neighbourliness is predicated on the Trinity. God's essential character of love, unity and joy in the community of the Godhead (the Perichoresis) is our anthem for having a heart for our community and it is a call for every follower of Jesus.²

Jesus taught us to pray each day, "Your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven."³

Beginning to discover "God's dream"⁴ for your neighbourhood is the starting place for community engagement. As Christians, we often feel like we need to look for the brokenness, the problems and the deficits in our community and then get out there and try to fix them. Instead, a good place to start is by looking for what is strong, resilient, good, just, and aligned with Kingdom values and the fruit of the Spirit. When we look for where God's Kingdom is already breaking forth in our neighbourhood, we will begin to find the partners and opportunities to work alongside the Spirit in what he is already doing.

Questions:

1. Who is your neighbour? Who lives in your community, and even right next door or across the street? Who are local business owners, and the movers and shakers?
2. Are you a "known character" in your neighbourhood? What kind of reputation have you started to build?
3. What is God's dream for your neighbourhood? What would it look like for Heaven to overtake earth right here, right now?
4. Where can you already see signs of the Spirit at work? Where can you see Kingdom values and the fruit of the Spirit?
5. What are you going to do to join in with God's activity where you live?

Blessings,

Gayle and Jono

BUV Mission Catalyst Team

[1] Paul Sparks, *The New Parish: How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*, (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014).

[2] Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset Based Approaches for Building Community Together*, (Herndon VA: Alban Institute, 2013).

[3] Matthew 6:9-13

[4] Tim Soerens, *Everywhere You Look: Discovering the Church Right Where You Are*, (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2020).



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PART 2: EVANGELISM



BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Mission Part 2 – Evangelism by Rev Brett Mitchell and Sulari Nielsen

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

Sulari: I love the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20. We are invited to go and share with all people of all nations. It's an invitation from Jesus to participate in His mission; in what He is already doing, and it is comforting to know that He is already there to guide us as we go. So, I decided to respond to this invitation to go....

My transformational experience of mission involved going to Cambodia with Global Interaction in January 2019. I had never been on an overseas mission trip and I didn't know what to expect. It was here I saw missional engagement and evangelism come to life. God opened my eyes to what His mission looks like, not only in a Global context, but also in my local context!

1 Peter 3:15 states “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” This is what I saw our cross-cultural workers in Cambodia doing. They spent time praying, waiting on God, learning the language and the culture. Evangelism and mission for them was spending time in their village getting to know the locals by forming reauthentic relationships with their hairdresser or barber; shopping at the same market; chatting with coffee shop owner; eating at a regular breakfast bar and buying clothes from the same shops. The Xposure trip had me reflecting on my understanding of evangelism and mission. I even changed jobs and started working for Global interaction as their Young Adults Consultant – that is how transformational the experience was!

Brett: I recall the very first time I went overseas as well – as exciting as it was to visit India I returned with a renewed enthusiasm about the fact that the world is on our own very doorstep, living and serving as I do, here in Melbourne.

I would not classify myself as an Evangelist – my strengths lie elsewhere – and yet, when I came to the realization that God has given to me, a very ordinary person, the invitation to share in His mission, my life has been anything but ordinary. My wife and I are about to embark on a new mission: move to a new house, yet again, and plant ourselves

smack in the middle of a new housing estate on the outskirts of Melbourne. Our plan is simple – wait (on God); listen (to our local community); and serve. I call that evangelism!

Sulari:

What does evangelism look like for your church or for you, personally? Ask yourself, “What do I already do well?” How you can use that to become creative in innovating what mission looks like in your local neighbourhood and context. It maybe something as simple, yet profound, as writing a note or letter; making a care package; or using your gifts and talents to safely serve and bless others. We must keep investing in our own relationship with Jesus so that those that we meet, see and speak with, can hear Jesus in us and through us. With evangelism there is no formula. God is working all around us, as He is already in our communities and invites us to participate in what He is already doing. Evangelism for me involves engaging with those who I encounter each time I go to the shops, exercise or am out engaging with my neighbours whilst gardening. One of the young adults, Cat, in my Global Interaction Unearthed Leadership team said recently “it involves loving the person in front of you”. Let’s use the opportunities that we have to go the extra mile to interact and start building some authentic relationships. Begin with one person – the same courier; barista; hairdresser; or sales assistant– be authentic, share your story, listen, and love them.

I am also surrounded by some incredible young adults at our church. Callum, recently expressed that “mission is every action you take, being Christlike every day and mission locally involves living with purpose and walking in step with Jesus.” Another young adult, Charlotte, shared “it’s God doing the work in people’s hearts – praying for opportunities. We must live mission in the everyday.” Let’s be inspired by these words and ask Christ to show us how we go and share to those on our doorstep and to the ends of the earth.

Our top tips, as we go out and live out the Great Commission is to:

- Listen to God – Begin with prayer and listen to and wait on God. Each day ask the Holy Spirit to guide, direct, and help you to be sensitive to those around you and to where God is already at work.
- Be prepared to share your story – Genuinely sharing your story, your personal Jesus encounter, using language others can hear and understand.
- Serving your family, friends, and neighbours – We need to safely serve in our own local contexts for the sake of seeing people come to know Christ. The heart of the cross is that Jesus entered a context, our world, to make the Father’s will known to us.

Note: In Stage 4 restrictions it is difficult to be practical and serve those around us. However, we can be creative in this. Mow someone’s lawn; order a care package; send a box of chocolates; purchase an Uber Eats gift-card; or a bunch of flowers; and show what it means to love, care and serve – please wear a mask, sanitise, wash your hands and adhere to the rules of contactless delivery!

Brett – Questions for consideration and discussion:

1. Why do you think so many Christians get a little nervous about the word evangelism? How do you feel about the word, and why?
2. If it is the Spirit’s job to draw people to the Father (John 12:32), how do we partner with God in this?
3. Who is it (who doesn’t yet follow Jesus) that the Lord has laid on your heart to love, bless and to serve at this time?
4. Is there a special group of people or a household that others in your Church can partner with together to love, bless and to serve, this coming month?
5. When can you set aside some time this coming week to specifically pray so that you can be better prepared (1 Peter 3:15) as you ‘go’ out into your world (Matt 28:18-20)?

Blessings,

Brett and Sulari

BUV Mission Catalyst Team



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PART 3: JUSTICE



BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Mission Part 3 – Justice by Rev Paul Manning

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘justice’ or the phrase ‘social justice’? Within the Church there’s often differing definitions and ideas about justice. It is also often seen as secondary, an optional extra to congregational mission or evangelism.

In our secular culture, there are four categories of justice theories :

- Libertarian – justice is basically about freedom;
- Liberal – justice is basically about fairness;
- Utilitarian – justice is basically about happiness;
- Postmodern – justice is basically about power.

All theories share two assumptions: there is no transcendent, moral absolutes on which to base justice and; they all see human nature as a blank slate that can be wholly reshaped by human means.[1]

Since none of these theories include God, using them to inform Congregational Mission is limited. And with God missing, the idea that justice is secondary, an optional extra to the Church’s mission, is only reinforced.

Fortunately, there’s an alternative, Biblical Justice, a theory of justice which includes God and can inform Congregational Mission. Biblical Justice is grounded in several truths:

We are created by God in His image [Genesis 1:26, 5:2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6].

We are created by God for loving Him as well as our neighbour as we love ourselves. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke when He identifies the greatest command as “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” [Luke 10:27]

God is just, therefore, the Scriptures condemns injustice because ‘with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.’ [2 Chronicles 19:7; refer also Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 103:6; Romans 9:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:6] In fact, justice, doing what is right and just is identified as a most acceptable act of worship [Proverbs 21:3; Amos 5:21-24].

Biblical Justice is rooted in seeking the welfare of those who are unable to fend for themselves; because these are the people who frequently get abused and treated unjustly. We’re told to show concern and care to the poor, wid-

ows, orphans and foreigners; we're to defend and seek the welfare of those who are most vulnerable to suffer from injustice [Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3].

What implications are linked to Biblical Justice for the individual follower of Jesus as well as for the collective followers of Jesus and Congregational Mission?

First, made in the image of God, all people must be treated equally and with dignity. Second, Biblical Justice is all about loving God and loving others. It's about our vertical relationship with God as well as our horizontal relationship with each other. Therefore, Biblical Justice demands a balanced approach, we must tell the gospel and confront sin, as we simultaneously stand against injustice.

In answer to the question: "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25-37]. We're told of a man who was travelling on his own, minding his own business, when he was attacked, stripped naked, and left to die. Clearly, this man had been a victim of injustice in that his basic rights were violated, via the unprovoked violent attack by others. The attack was unfair and undeserved; through no fault of his own, he was beaten, naked, half dead; the man was disempowered, degraded, humiliated, pushed aside, left to die.

Adding salt to the wound, two men, a priest and a Levite, who both held top roles within Jewish culture/society, (two men who should have known and done better), walked past him; their actions only reinforced – almost validated – the injustice already experienced by this man. Unable to help himself, the man became trapped within the circumstances into which he'd been pushed.

The 'good Samaritan' saw the injustice – he did something, he acted, he gave the man a helping hand up and out of the unfair, undeserved circumstances.

Putting it in today's language... he stopped his car, jumped out, ran over to the man, picked him up, put him in his car, drove him to the nearest private hospital, paid for his care, checked on him a day later, and paid the remaining amount owed. The 'good Samaritan', the one who stopped, got his hands dirty, he literally got blood on his hands and dirt on his clothes.

We need more people willing to get their hands dirty. More willing to show love and give hope; we need to be people loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves!

Remember, Jesus told this story in answer to the Jewish lawyer's question, "Who is my Neighbour?" [Luke 10:29]. In the end Jesus' answer is simple – EVERYONE – everyone is your neighbour, there are no exceptions.

With this answer Jesus makes the point we need to treat ALL people equally, there's no exceptions. Jesus does this by making the Samaritan the hero in the story and by doing this He reinforces that we are to act justly, show mercy, to love and give hope, even our 'enemies' are included in the ALL; there's no exceptions, ALL people are our neighbour and potentially need us to show them love and give them hope. This includes people who are 'local' as well as people who are 'global'. This means we do need to think beyond our borders, we do need to think global, we do need to respond to the injustice being experienced by people we probably will never meet.

Through the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus makes clear we are not to just talk about justice, we must do justice. He ends the parable with the instruction to "Go and do likewise." [Luke 10:37]

This means we need a balanced approach to Congregational Mission; we need to include justice. We need to dispense compassion and love into our broken world; and give those trapped in unjust circumstances freedom and hope. We need to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. [Micah 6:8]

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Jesus demonstrate a balanced approach between sharing the gospel while responding to injustice?
2. How can you 'do justice' in your life? List 1 or 2 practical things you could do this week.
3. What are some practical ways you can 'do justice' in your congregational mission?

Blessings,

Paul

Church Relationship Manager; Baptist World Aid



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PART 4: PARTNERSHIPS



BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Mission Part 4 – Partnerships by Geoff Maddock and Leanne Hill

*“Make yourselves at home there and work for the country’s welfare.
Pray for Babylon’s well-being. If things go well for Babylon, things will go well for you.”(The Message)*

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (NIV) Jeremiah 29:7

Partnership with Babylon? Surely not, Lord!

It turns out that God has designed the people of God to be tethered to the world around them. It’s clear from this scripture that if the world around us flourishes, God’s people will share in that flourishing. As the great Baptist preacher declared, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”[1]

In these two versions of Jeremiah 29:7, the words “welfare”, “well-being”, “peace” and “prosperity” are all derived from the one Hebrew word, Shalom. This word is so wonderfully spacious it holds all our best God-given hopes for healing, salvation, reconciliation, justice and renewal. There is no better word to describe God’s plans for the whole cosmos. This is the mission of God and partnership is essential.

While we can be grateful that we are not enslaved by the ancient Babylonians, we are still caught up in this network of mutuality and compelled to “seek the shalom of the city.” So, what does this mean for us? How do we flourish through partnership? What does it take for the church to be the people of Shalom in the places where God has sent us?

There are challenges and opportunities to be sure (and we’ll get to those!), but first, good partnership will reflect the ways of God. Here we can briefly identify two of these ways. Without much effort you will recognize them as core to the ministry of Jesus. These characteristics are intentionality and self-sacrifice.

To be intentional is to properly survey your context and stay alert to what the Spirit of God is up to in your neighbourhood. Just like Jesus, be willing to come alongside unlikely (and even unliked) members of your community if that’s what leads to shalom. It’s risky to follow Jesus, and that leads us to....

Self-sacrifice. To be self-sacrificial in partnership is to understand that we will not always own, manage, and control partnership projects nor will we fully agree with those we work alongside. The enslaved Israelites certainly had good reason to find conflict with the Babylonians. Talk about value differences and culture wars...they were in the midst of an actual war! And yet God didn't excuse them from partnership. The call to seek the prosperity of their captives sounds a lot like the words Jesus utters some 600 years later – "love your enemies"[2] New Millennium. Same God.

Challenge

While this biblical example of partnership in the midst of slavery is extreme, our ministries will involve their own difficulties. Invariably we will need to share conversations, projects, and plans with people and organisations that see the world very differently to us. When we think about partnership in this context, we can sometimes fear that we might lose something, like control or ownership of an idea or initiative. This challenge should be held up to the light of God's work not only in the world around us but in our own discipleship journey (as individuals and churches). Might God be inviting us into partnerships to teach us reliance on God's control and provision, not our own? It would be just like God to transform us even as God transforms the world through us.

Opportunity

When we read the New Testament, we see that Jesus didn't passively attend events or idly sit by. As he interacted with people, he was actively present not just in saying and doing, but in listening and discerning. How might partnership be an opportunity to really listen to your neighbours, especially those who have no interest in or affiliation with your church? How might partnership be an exercise of discerning what God is up to in our neighbourhoods?

We are called to partner with God in what God is already doing. As we have walked around our neighbourhoods, we see people partnering together, making and sharing masks, helping each other with shopping, bringing joy through Spoonville displays (where families are decorating wooden spoons and creating little villages in the front gardens for neighbours to add to or simply take joy in). We see where community groups are providing care, life's necessities and genuine love to others.

Partnership is at the heart of how God expects us to live out shalom. It is at the intersection of God's people and God's world that we have the opportunity to really encounter the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven."

In conclusion, we leave you with a quote from our Parish Collective friends that reminds us what it means to be the church-for-others:

"Loving without agenda: Often our neighborhoods are filled with special interest groups. The church is not a special interest group; rather we have a reconciling mission that seeks unity, that all might flourish. Consider how your faith community can champion what others are already doing." [3]

Questions to consider:

1. How can you increase reach into your neighbourhood through partnerships?
2. How can you this week notice and engage in a deeper way with what is already happening in your local community and partner with others to seek the welfare of the city? (look up the homepage of your local council website and identify where their mission and vision overlap and intersect with the values and attributes of the Kingdom of God).
3. Could we accomplish more of our mission objectives if we partnered with others?
4. Would the community benefit if we partnered with another group?
5. How would the Kingdom of God be realised if we entered into a partnership with others?

Blessings,
Geoff and Leanne

[1] Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail.

[2] Matthew 5:44

[3] Sparks, Soerens and Friesen – The New Parish