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FACILITATING PERSONAL AND CORPORATE EVANGELISM
AT MALVERN UNITING CHURCH, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

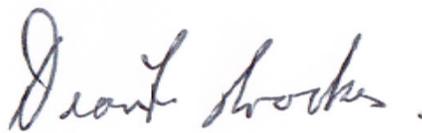
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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FACILITATING PERSONAL AND CORPORATE EVANGELISM
AT MALVERN UNITING CHURCH, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JONATHAN IVOR DAVIES
JANUARY 2015

ABSTRACT

Facilitating Personal and Corporate Evangelism at Malvern Uniting Church, Adelaide, Australia

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2014

Conscious of the decline in the Australian Church, this project seeks to help members of Malvern Uniting Church to be a faith sharing community through a strategy of: group mentoring in evangelism and a weekend community festival designed as an opportunity to share faith. Malvern Uniting Church is located in a wealthy suburb of Adelaide. Church members relate to a variety of non-believers, yet feel unprepared to share faith. For this project, contextual evangelism is twofold: first, faith sharing for individuals in their everyday location and, secondly, corporate faith sharing for the church community also in its location.

Part One of this paper examines the suburb of Malvern. It highlights history and demographics, the people, their work and social lives, their children and financial priorities. It gives consideration to the negative aspects of the community and perceived unimportance of faith. Turning attention towards the church, this paper examines its history and denominational particulars, its values and stated vision, its focus of ministry and struggle to be relevant in an affluent suburb.

Part Two engages with literature pertinent to that of the Church and evangelism. Both biblical and theological information are considered. This aspect of the paper develops a relevant ecclesiology and draws a discussion of contextual evangelism and its place in the life of the church. This section ends by developing a theology of contextual evangelism that sees a progression from individual to community evangelism as modeled by Jesus and continued by the Spirit.

Part Three focuses on developing contextual evangelism in light of theological reflection, community needs, and location of church members. Careful consideration is given to people, resources, and logistics. It is hoped this would develop contextual evangelism as a way of life for Malvern Church. The goals and direction for future efforts emerge from this trial.

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Psalm 103 "Praise the Lord o my soul, all that is within me praise his holy name."

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INTRODUCTION

The River Murray is an icon of Australia. In a land of drought and hot, northerly winds it is a river of life. Drawing from various sources including the Murrumbidgee, the Darling and the Lachlan rivers, it winds its way through Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. At the bottom end of the Murray-Darling Basin, it finally combines into one big river in South Australia. It is a slow river, deep and wide but dangerous to the unwary. When it rains in some far-distant catchment, the water gathers and the river engorges. The big, sleepy river becomes full, it swells and its banks break. For a time it runs wild with surging ferocity, washing all before it, running with heightened speed into the lower lakes of the Coorong and then the Southern Ocean (Indian Ocean).

As the water abates it returns to its course and retreats almost into normality. Some stretches of the river's bank have been changed irrevocably. The big river with all its bends and turns has in some strange way decided to straighten its path and set a new course. This done, the river leaves behind smaller pools of water known as billabongs. Billabongs are where the river used to run in former days. Now ostracized from the river they become life systems in their own right of a sort.

Billabongs hold water, but are stagnant. No life apart from the occasional rain gathers in them, no fish apart from those originally trapped survive. It is a breeding ground for mosquitoes, snakes, turtles and yabbies. With that aside, billabongs are quite safe; safe because there is no current, no floods and not a lot of change. The river on the other hand is quite dangerous; it is filled with sunken logs and debris. It has fast rapids and twisting undertows. Many have drowned in its depths. Eventually it draws everything

out to the sea. The river though is full of life; it is always making new life and always changing.

The Australian Church loves to camp around the billabong. In fact it has made its home there quite happily and even built a series of permanent structures. Things are predictable at the billabong; the environment is controlled and can be managed. Change is slow and the dangers are minimal. The occasional rain contributes to the life of the billabong, but that just fills the water level up slightly and lulls the Church into a sense that it can grow. But the fishing is poor. In fact it is nonexistent. Of course eels love it but they are not fish. Stagnant water does not breed good fish.

The real fishing is in the river. It teems with fish. A quick glance at the bird life tells you how many fish are in the water. They are abundant even in dry years for the water is deep. The river has all the oxygen it needs, all the nutrients it requires to be a self-sustaining life form. With the right bait the fishing is good. However, the Australian Church does not like to live by the river. Only a brave few go to these extremes and more often than not they are the radicals not from the established variety. The Australian Church is busy building and maintaining structures in safer places. Garry Bouma In *Australian Soul* writes, “The church has cooperated in its own marginalization, finding a position on the edges of society more comfortable and less risky than a more demanding central position.”¹

The river is too dangerous and changeable, its macro environment cannot be controlled nor can the future be predicted. Events way upstream have repercussions far

¹ Garry Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 130.

downriver. Forces that are not understood bring big change with sweeping momentum. To live on the bank is difficult, one false move and a person can end up in the water and be swept downstream out of control. All kinds of species live in its waters; the huge Murray Cod, Golden and Silver Perch, even Brown and Rainbow Trout in some parts. yabbies, shrimp and fresh water crayfish live there galore. It provides life for those who take the risks. The question of this paper is a simple one: How do disciples of Jesus move an institutional church from the billabong to the river's edge?

Malvern Church is set in the eastern "leafy "suburbs of Adelaide.² It is a mid-size congregation with mid-four hundreds on the attendance role and hundreds of others loosely connected. Primarily made up of double-income professionals, families and retirees, many of whom live within twenty-five minutes of the building, most attendees are middle to upper income and well educated. The bluestone building has stood for 125 years as a bastion of Methodism and the place of God in Malvern. The interior of the building lends itself nicely to traditional worship. With an imposing organ and an elevated pulpit, it is a "beautiful" setting highly sought for weddings.

Currently the church employs four staff and effectively utilizes a high number of volunteers in key roles. It has a wide range of ministries ranging from servicing the retirement village across the road, chaplaincy at a neighboring private school, week-long holiday children's programs and four distinct worshiping times. Malvern Church has many community engagement opportunities ranging from a yearly "Christmas in the Street Party," to community dinners and themed seminars. Many would consider Malvern

² This name also includes the linked congregation Unley Uniting Church, but for brevity only Malvern Church will be used.

Church to be healthy, and to a large extent it is, although closer inspection uncovers significant gaps in the middle- to lower-age groupings. With the rapid decline of suburban churches in the area, many new members have joined Malvern and in the last eight years it has seen approximately 10 percent growth.

The real issue for Malvern Uniting is a problem of conversion growth: How does a traditional church in the centre of a wealthy suburb engage the community with the gospel? The problem for Malvern Uniting can be clearly seen in two areas. First, creating legitimate ways to share the Gospel with the community. Second, there is a lack of motivated members who actually feel able to share their faith.

It has often been said that the Church is one generation away from dying. Malvern Church is no exception. Clearly, conversion growth is vital to ongoing, sustainable life. This problem and this paper are not however primarily about church growth. Rather at its core it is about living out the Gospel of Jesus in everyday life as a church and as individuals. It matters for the life and health of the church and it matters in the long term as it shapes the culture of the future.

Pastors want to see the church under their pastoral oversight grow and as senior minister I am no exception. But more than just growth, I recognize there is something wrong with a church that does not adequately share faith and only grows through the demise of other congregations. My heart breaks for those in the suburb of Malvern who have yet to hear about Jesus in a form and manner that they can understand.

The New Testament presents conversion growth as normative for the early church and *ipso facto* (this is true) for Malvern Uniting (Acts 12:24).³ Having an outward focus is the mark of disciples whose lives are turned towards Jesus and are seeking to honour him in all that they do. This is not just doing well, which we are good at, but getting to the act of verbally sharing faith. As much as this is accurate for a lone disciple this is also true for the whole local church. Indeed this could be a crucial step in helping other local churches who are watching Malvern Uniting with interest. Faith sharing is not something that Australian Christians do well, if at all. Malvern Church has the unique privilege to stand just that little bit higher than other churches in the area and, as such, exerts some influence. If Malvern Church can create a culture of sharing faith as a natural part of church life, and if it results in conversions, then the results may be seen in three spheres: personal, local church and wider church. There are many implications for Malvern Church to break the mold, to step away from the billabong and live by the river.

In order to take a small step towards realising this goal the thesis of this paper is as follows. Conscious of the decline in the Australian Church, this project seeks to help members of Malvern Church to be a faith sharing community through a strategy of: group mentoring in evangelism and a weekend community festival designed as an opportunity to share faith. The strategy to develop a culture of conversion is quite simple; it hinges on two parts, the first being individual mentoring and secondly, church-wide opportunities.

Essentially, a small cluster group of around six people will be formed and trained in evangelism. They will meet regularly for mutual encouragement, accountability and prayer. The end result of the cluster is that participants are trained, equipped and willing

³ Unless otherwise stated all Scripture is taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

to share faith. They are coached to see that God has placed them uniquely to share with friends, relatives and work colleagues. Stage two of the process is that this initial cluster group would get alongside another Malvern Church member and disciple them into faith sharing. When enough people are suitably encouraged and disciplined, the church will plan and run a community event where faith sharing on a larger scale might take place.

This project further examines the social context of Malvern Church's immediate suburb including the factors that influence and play into the dynamics of the population. It looks at the history that shaped the church and throws light on the "way we are" and what values shape the church. Furthermore this project studies contemporary missional theologians and theologies of the church including those of evangelism. It draws from wider wisdom to influence Malvern Church on its road to being a faith-sharing community. Finally, this paper concludes with the results of the trial in the life and people of Malvern Church and what influence there was on the suburb of Malvern.

The analogy of the billabong is a real one. The church, Malvern Uniting Church, has to move spiritually and pragmatically from its comfortable historic site and into the dangers of the water's edge. It has to strive to share faith as individuals and as a local church. This paper is about that journey and it begins with exploring the contours of the river.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF MALVERN, ADELAIDE

Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, is nestled between the Mount Lofty Ranges, the Adelaide plains and the Gulf of St. Vincent. Prior to White settlement, the vast area was inhabited by the Kaurna, the original indigenous peoples of the land. European settlers desired it to be set up as a planned colony. This varied significantly from other Australian states, born from convict settlement, in that it was designed for free settlers, many of whom had pre-purchased land in London.¹ Adelaide was without any convict influence and the city boasts a strong English heritage in both name and culture.²

Originally set out by William Light in 1835 with a well-planned grid of north/south, east/west roads, it had the three desirable factors for a city: a safe harbour, good drainage and fresh water. Apparently Light's other responsibility was to find a place of “ready internal and external communications and easily obtained building materials.”³

Adelaide is surrounded by parklands and five distinct park squares within the city

¹ McDougall and Vines Conservation and Heritage Consultants, “The City of Adelaide, A Thematic History,” City of Adelaide, http://www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/assets/acc/Council/docs/city_of_adelaide_thematic_history.pdf (accessed January 17, 2014).

² A South Australian accent is often mistaken by residents of other Australian states as English.

³ McDougal and Vines, “The City of Adelaide,” 2.

bounds. In recent years many immigrants have found Adelaide to be home, especially in the post-World War Two years. Immigrants include Greek, Italian, German and Middle Eastern settlers, South East Asians, and most recently, Sudanese. Roughly 1.23 million people call Adelaide home and in 2013 it was ranked Australia's most livable city.⁴ Adelaide is known for its arts and cultural festivals, sport, city circuit car racing and Mediterranean climate.

Adelaide has, in the past, been a bastion of religion as seen by the number of churches and with its nickname "the city of churches."⁵ McDougal and Vines comment, "It is interesting to note that in 1900, when there were thirty-three churches and chapels within the Adelaide city area, six were Methodist, five were Anglican and two were Roman Catholic."⁶ Things have changed in the last 110 years as latest census figures state emphatically that "no religion" is the highest religious affiliation.⁷ Paradoxically for the place called the City of Churches, Adelaide now ranks just behind Canberra and Hobart as the least religious of Australian cities.⁸ Some would want to rename it as the

⁴ Larissa Nicholson, "Adelaide the Country's Most Liveable City," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/adelaide-the-countrys-most-liveable-city-20130304-2ffeh.html> (accessed September 23, 2013).

⁵ McDougal and Vines, "The City of Adelaide," 110.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2011 Census Quick Stats: Malvern," Australian Bureau of Statistics, http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC40394?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed September 23, 2013).

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Australian Social Trends, April 2013," Australia Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30April+2013> (accessed September 23, 2013).

“city of disappearing churches” as over time many places of worship have been decommissioned or used for other purposes.⁹

The suburb of Malvern, within the municipality of Unley, is less than four kilometres south of the city centre, just beyond the parklands. Reasonably small compared to many other suburbs, its borders contain only 1.1 square kilometres. With its good quality soil, it had in the past been used for agriculture. With its closeness to the city it became an attractive place of residence.¹⁰ Initially laid out in 1881, it formed part of the rapidly growing Adelaide.¹¹ The original land agents painted a rosy picture of the new subdivision according to Lyn:

No distance from that enchanting spot - the Waterfall, and is almost under the brow of our noble mountain range. Native birds sport themselves undisturbed in the fine trees which ornament Malvern. . . . No mosquitoes or sandflies will disturb the sleeping of the wide-awake purchasers . . . the cool breezes from the hills precludes the possibility of their existence in this perfect Eden. No factory chimneys, no dust storms, no shrieking tram motors; all the delights of rural life within ten minutes travel of the city pleasures.¹²

Methodism played a big part in the suburb's beginnings. The real estate agents, C.H. Matters & Co., who had holdings in the area, exerted their religious heritage.¹³

⁹ SA Life, “Adelaide’s Lost Churches,” SA Life, <http://www.salife7.com.au/adelaide/places/historical/adelaide-s-lost-churches> (accessed January 7, 2014).

¹⁰ McDougall and Vines, “The City of Adelaide,” Appendix 3, page 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹² Rob Linn, *Malvern Uniting Church: A Centenary History* (Blackwood, SA: Historical Consultants, 1991), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

Indeed, the Methodist influence was so strong that the original design precluded the building of hotels and the area was designated a temperance suburb.¹⁴

The suburb rapidly expanded with the development of homes and improvements in roads. With an extension to the tramline track, transport suddenly became easy. Homes constructed of local blue stone with wrought iron verandahs were typical. The housing was low density, with large spacious blocks and wide streets laid out in a grid like order. This attracted a high number of professionals and white-collar workers and with its proximity to the city it was a desirable suburb. Shops began to open along the main streets and other facilities like water, gas and a twice-daily postal service made the suburb function well.¹⁵

Malvern an Old Suburb with an Expanding Middle Class

Over one hundred years later the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics on Malvern paints a rather unique picture of this small suburb. Malvern is now well-established and just forty-five years younger than Adelaide itself. As it moves into its second century it remains a desirable place to live for those who can afford it. Professionals remain the overwhelming majority of occupants in the 1,061 houses.¹⁶ The “Professionals” and “Managers” categories account for over 58 percent of all working people in Malvern. For the same categories, Adelaide has 32 percent and Australia overall, 34 percent.¹⁷

¹⁴ Linn, “Malvern Uniting Church,” 3.

¹⁵ McDougall and Vines, “The City of Adelaide,” 4.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “2011 Census Quick Stats.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

The Gradual Influx of New Families

The steady influx of new residents and, in particular families, is quite apparent. A gentle stroll around the suburb illustrates this point. On any barmy evening it is common to see children walking happily with parents and prams in abundance. Cars in the shopping centres are outfitted with baby capsules and children's booster seats. Specialist children's shops are popular. Playgrounds are frequented and the schools are numerous and full. Twenty percent of the suburb is under fifteen years of age, 6 percent higher than the national average of families with children.¹⁸ It remains a desirable suburb in which to bring up children, especially for those that can afford it.

Easy Proximity to the Central Business District

Adelaide's traffic is nothing to be concerned about. With the suburb being just south of the parklands, it is an easy drive and many do it in a few minutes. Even at peak hour the commute is not over twenty minutes. The suburb is attractive to professionals of all walks who can be in their offices quickly. With the high income most can afford to run several cars, in fact the 2011 census tells that an average household has 1.8 cars.¹⁹

The Development of Old Properties

One of the noticeable physical trends is the renovation of older properties. Most original houses were built out of substantial local material. This includes quarried sandstone and often redgum timber flooring. The walls were made quite thick so as to keep out the heat, especially pre air-conditioning days. For the winter the thick walls kept

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

in the warmth of an open fire. Many if not most of the houses were built with wide verandas that serve as an outdoor living area in summer. As a whole they are of a stately shape. The gardens, long established with substantial trees, are often an object of pride. Very few of these homes are ever knocked over; in fact the local council takes a dim view on any modern modifications. Many thousands of dollars are spent in the renovation of the older properties. Floors are polished, brickwork re-pointed and gardens renovated. Before the global financial crisis it was not unusual to see many tradesmen's vans in front of a house as what looked like a team of men worked to restore a classic Malvern home. Again this makes Malvern an attractive place to live in, raise a family and if at all possible, buy into.

Malvern as an Example of Eastern Adelaide Suburbs

Malvern, while unique, has some similarities with other Eastern suburbs. It represents the more middle- to upper-class parts of society and with this, a sense of conservatism. For example, traditional family values are alive and well in the suburb. Out of 2,577 people in Malvern, 1,148 are married. The strange anomaly of this is that out of those 1,148 people who are married, 18 more females were married than men.²⁰ Marriage statistics aside, this similarity becomes important when the place of the church is examined as many of the church members come from the eastern suburbs. This conservatism plays into many aspects of social life, not the least of all being faith.

²⁰Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2011 Census Quick Stats."

A Suburb of Wealth

Malvern is a privileged suburb. With property values high and such close proximity to the city it is a place where only the wealthy can afford to live. Those in the working class cannot afford to live within its bounds. Increasingly with parents and grandparents earning reasonable incomes families who live in the suburb have had many years of high prosperity.

The Importance of Showing Wealth

It is a suburb where the wealthy reside. Showing wealth is a cultural value that runs strongly in the suburb. With a primarily high-middle to upper-class population, it is not surprising to find the average family income almost \$1200 a week higher than the South Australian average.²¹ Indeed with the South Australian average of monthly mortgage payments being in the order of \$1500, it is quite telling that Malvern's is an average of \$2253.²² Obviously many households of professionals are double income. To some extent the suburb is about perception. A trip anywhere outside of the house is taken seriously. One could surmise this attitude comes from the post-World War II era when many of the older generation bought into the area. They began to build their assets from the bottom up. For many, life was a great struggle and frugality was the name of the era.

Prosperity came rapidly for Australia post war, and the eastern suburbs of Adelaide developed well. It could be assumed that a sign of success is to show wealth. This included cars, gardens and the appearance of the house. Clothes and personal

²¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2011 Census Quick Stats: Malvern."

²² Ibid.

grooming now took a high place in this order. Although statistics are hard to find, personal observation suggests that, unless one is a student, secondhand cars are not purchased. Suburban cars include such makes as Peugeot, Mercedes, BMW and Audi. Worthy of note is the average age of a Malvern resident is forty-three. Clearly this is an age where many people begin to settle into careers and increase earning potential. With all these factors it is not surprising that wealth is so readily displayed.

Consumerism as a Way of Life

Naturally high wealth and showing wealth breeds a culture of consumerism. Choice abounds in all manner of things and consumerism covers a wide range of products. Brand consciousness is a factor in the purchasing motivation for Malvern residents. Designer brands are displayed in abundance. Unless items are of the retro genre they are quickly cast aside. One resident quipped, “Nothing devalues your car as your neighbor’s new one.” Often, council street-side pickups reveal hardly any worn out items. Lounges and televisions are discarded because they have been replaced with later versions. While there are nearby op shops, these are frequented by non-locals because of the quality of the clothing and goods. Malvern people throw out good items because they can afford to and because they desire the newest and latest. For some, it could be argued that this is really an entertainment factor, the so-called “retail therapy.” For others it is just a way of life they have become accustomed to.

The Necessity of Private Schooling

The city of Adelaide with its strong English background is home to many private schools. While there are none in Malvern, there are several on its borders. Malvern, typical of the eastern suburbs, takes great pride in sending its children to one of these institutions. Census data reveals that 180 young people were enrolled in secondary schooling years seven to twelve. Of those, 50 were in government schools and 130 in private, a significantly high figure, representing many thousands of dollars per student.²³

There is a common belief that these upper echelon schools train the next leaders of the community. Elitist and naïve that attitude may well be, but it runs strong in the culture and in part drives the enrolments. The question: “Where did you go to school?” comes fast on the heels of an introduction with locals. Private schooling is seen as an important cultural marker that shows wealth and, as a result, good standing in the community. Even if one of the parent’s entire salary goes into the fees, many residents would not think of sending their children to anything but a private school.

The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis and Debt

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the global financial crisis has had some, albeit small, impact on business in the Malvern area. Coffee shops in the suburb report a slowing down of trade. Other businesses have “sale” signs out front—something rarely seen in days past. The global financial crisis had an adverse impact on retirees with their superannuation funds, but many of these are homeowners and can ride the storm. Recent closures of car manufacturers, including Holden and Mitsubishi, affect the whole State.

²³ Ibid.

Malvern seems to have escaped the worst of the crisis, possibly because of the necessity of the residents' occupations. Currently unemployment for Malvern sits at 3.9 percent as compared to Adelaide's 5.7 percent.²⁴ Debt levels are hard to establish, but it is clear that Malvern residents have a higher homeowner percentage than the rest of South Australia.²⁵

Malvern residents also have a lower rented status of almost 10 percent less than the rest of the country. Possibly one impact of the crisis has been on family holidays. More people today, it seems, holiday interstate rather than overseas. In the end though, while it is clear that mortgages and rent are higher, it seems that Malvern is far more robust financially and has been able to ride out the global financial crisis.

White Collar Jobs

Many of the occupations of Malvern residents fit under the white-collar category. All things considered this comes as no surprise. Real estate prices necessitate a larger income. Higher education also seems to lead to better jobs of an elevated skill level. It is a privileged suburb and privileged people live there.

Time Poor Professionals: Two per Household

Professional people comprise the overwhelming number of careers. The occupations that make the top of the list are in the areas of legal and accounting services, hospitals, school and tertiary education and medical services. The 2011 census data draws

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. Census data tells the picture: 43.6 percent of those in Malvern own outright, as opposed to the rest of the state at 32.8 percent.

a stark picture for these professions. For example, legal and accounting make up 7.2 percent of the local workforce compared to an Australian average of 2.1 percent.²⁶ The trend is similar for medical services where 4.5 percent of Malvern's workforce is in that field in contrast to just 1.0 percent nationwide. When the statistics are categorised into broader types of occupation the data is even more enlightening. Malvern residents in the professionals grouping are twice the Australian average, 42.8 percent against 21.3 percent. The averages are reversed for occupations like laborers who are 3.5 percent compared to the Australian average of 9.4 percent and trades 5.5 percent against Australian 14.2 percent.

It is no surprise, with Malvern being so close to the Central Business District, that people such as doctors, lawyers, professors and senior managers reside there. It could be assumed, because of the nature of the occupations, that these people work long hours. Moreover it seems common that both husband and wife are in a professional job. Census data shows that 22.1 percent of families had both adults working with 26 percent of families with one full time employed and one part time.²⁷ Both numbers are only slightly above the national average, which is quite deceiving. Indeed, so are the hours worked with Malvern being right on the national average. However, adding the numbers of adults working and the occupations brings a different picture to the suburb. Censuses data only tabulates "40 hours or more per week" with no indication of what "more" means. The key it seems is occupation. Some occupations demand longer hours and significant afterhours work. It is easy to conclude that Malvern residents are, on the whole, time poor or

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

affected by family members who are time poor. This means in a practical sense that there is little time given for such things as friends, leisure and health. In fact one of the feeders for issues across the suburb is the lack of time to create new friendships.

The Expectations on Children and Low Parental Support

With parents in high-paid professional jobs the children of the suburb are children of high achievers. Take into account their enrollment in high-achieving private schools that thrive on success. Many thousands of dollars are spent on their education and sporting activities. Expectations are high from parents, school and the community. It is assumed they will go on and do well at school, have a high grade point average and be successful at university. These children are wealthy and know what it is to have means; consumerism is in their culture.²⁸ When various cultural factors are combined a picture of life as a child in this suburb emerges. Many of the children have money given to them and spent on them to make up for the lack of parent time. Even very young children do not have a lot of time with their parents. This is clearly illustrated by the number of employed nannies bringing children to one of Malvern Church's playgroups. Records indicate half of the adults present are nannies in employ of families of the suburb. The culture is that children have high hopes placed on them with minimal parent input.

Mental Health Issues: Stress across the Community

Like every suburb there are mental health issues in Malvern. Several residents of the suburb attend Malvern Uniting and have mild mental health conditions. One person

²⁸ On many occasions as a youth pastor leading a youth group, the young people had far more in their wallets than I did.

locally known as the “Street Walker” does just that—walks around all the time, every day even during the night.²⁹ Displays of mental health conditions are rare. It does not seem like this is an overbearing issue in the Malvern community. Residents being close to the city with all its resources and typically having money have the means to get all the help they need. Further, the cost of housing and rentals and the fact that there is no government housing in the area must be a contributor. However, digging deeper it is not hard to conclude with anecdotal evidence that there has to be stress-related issues. Houses are expensive, the costs associated with raising children in a wealthy suburb, the cost of maintaining the “look,” issues of a high performance job feed into stress. Relationships must be under strain with all these factors added, especially poverty of time. Guilt too must play some part as parents struggle to balance work and parental duties. All these things add to create a picture of a community that is under significant stress and duress.

The Negative Past Influence of Church-based Schools

One significant spin-off for private schooling, with all its educational benefits, is the negative influence on faith. With many current students and graduates from church-based schools living in Malvern it is noticeable how this has a direct bearing on attitudes towards faith. Anecdotal evidence suggests that formal religion, as expressed in schools of this nature, has largely inoculated students against the Gospel. In the culture there seems to be a sense of numbness towards God that is expressed in a blasé attitude towards the church and religion in general. It is uncommon to find anyone who speaks positively towards their school faith experience. For those who have graduated from

²⁹ It is unclear if he is a Malvern resident or from a neighbouring suburb.

school there is a sense of disengagement with the church and no desire to explore reasons for faith. Past schooling has ensured that religion has no bearing on life, neither in the past nor the present. This has significant repercussions as to how the adults choose to expose their children to the Church and church-based programs. Further, recent clergy sex scandals, some of which have taken place at schools, play into this mix. Australia-wide there is now a real lack of trust towards clergy and the institutional Church.³⁰

The Lack of Community

Malvern suffers for the lack of a shared place for community. A street directory of the suburb shows only one small reserve or park and no oval space or recreation area. Whilst nearby suburbs have recreational parks and Malvern residents travel to these, there is no communal gathering place, no open space for Malvern. Schools offer this, but of course only for a subsection of society and then only for a particular reason. Malvern has no community place.

Living Behind Security and Gates

Over the years as new families and residents have purchased houses in the area a subtle change has occurred in the physical layout of homes. The last twenty years have seen the gradual rise in homes that have been fitted with tall wrought iron fences and pass coded gates. Of note is that many fences are constructed to keep people out but still able to be seen through, thus showing off the gardens. Malvern Uniting has in the past delivered phone books to the suburb as a fundraiser. Many volunteers have complained at

³⁰ Sarah Price, "In God We Trust, but not God's Church," *The Sun Herald*, <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=5147> (accessed January 7, 2014).

the difficulty of placing the phone books on the front veranda of residences. Many homes do not have access to the front garden and front door unless granted remotely by the householder from inside the house. Very few children are seen playing in the streets or walking unaccompanied. Roller doors lock away cars and security systems are quite obvious. It seems as if there is a fear of the stranger that drives this trend and the overwhelming need for secure privacy. This indicates a decline in trust.

The Backyard as a Safe Place

With the emphasis on gardens in the Malvern area it is not surprising to find that backyards are the place most families gather. It is where much of the late-spring, summer and early-autumn entertaining is done. While functionally the backyard is purpose built for entertainment, a broader picture begins to shape. The back yard is the safe place. In Malvern's culture, backyards hold no surprises and nothing to fear. For the householder it is a secure place, locked behind the front security and away from prying eyes. In many senses it is typical of the evolving nature of the community and the gradual privatization of individuals and family groups. Some of this is driven by fear of the stranger, fear of criminals as inspired by the media, fear of what others might say and how they might judge. Some of this backyard usage is just how society is changing with the advent of social media and the desire for anonymity. People feel comfortable in the environment that they know and are able to relax.

Coffee Shop Culture as a Place of Gathering

Over the last few decades Adelaide has seen the emergence of coffee shops as part of the regular culture. The residents of Malvern have embraced this wholeheartedly and, if anything, the several coffee houses in the suburb have offered a place of gathering for friends. Meeting for coffee is very popular. While it is a public space and there is an opportunity to mingle with other members of the community, in reality this rarely happens. Most residents prefer to prearrange gatherings with their friends on a private table or drink their coffee while reading the morning paper. Eye contact, conversation with strangers and sharing tables is certainly discouraged. Business deals are done at coffee shops, but it is certainly not a place to strike up a conversation with a stranger. As such it really is a conditional place of gathering, not a place of community.

More People Living Alone

The picture for the suburb takes a unique turn when census data for 2001 and 2011 are compared. While there are a few less people in the widow status the numbers of separated or divorced has risen dramatically. In 2001 it was 138, and by 2011 it rose to 194. Aloneness is becoming more common. While data for de facto marriage from the 2001 census is difficult to find, the 2011 information indicates Malvern has a 5.3 percent *de facto* average for those aged fifteen and over compared to the national average at 9.5 percent.³¹ This indicates that *de facto* relationships are quite low in the suburb.³² With more people divorced and not choosing *de facto* relationships it is supposed that

³¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2011 Census Quick Stats: Malvern."

³² Interestingly the South Australian average is slightly higher than the national with 9.6 percent.

loneliness is on the increase. Couple this with the isolating nature of social media and hollowness of virtual relationships and the future for those suffering from loneliness are not too bright.

The Monoculture of Malvern

Malvern is quite unique in the stability of its setting. While much of Adelaide has molded and changed, Malvern has remained largely settled. Advances in technology have changed the way the suburb operates but it still looks the way it did many years ago. Pictures of days gone by bear an uncanny resemblance to the present day. It remains quite settled in style and race of occupancy. One resident commented in opposition to the church's plan of development that "we like our village the way it is."³³ It has and remains untouched by the waves of immigration Australia faced in the last thirty years.

The Effect of Postmodernism: Personal Stories are Welcome

The culture of Malvern has clearly been influenced by the classic tenets of postmodernism. While many residents are well educated, there is a healthy skepticism over the universality of truth. Conversations over faith stumble at the point of a sovereign God and any need for salvation. It is seen as too abstract and in a pejorative sense as an imposition from a historical church that has self-serving agendas. Residents have significant mistrust over any truth that can be broadly applied to all people, seeing it as a remnant of a bygone era. In a sense, postmodernism is very comfortable for wealthy people to adopt as a worldview as it offers no grand metanarrative and has limited personal responsibility outside of a person's own thoughts, likes and dislikes. In stark

³³Anonymous member of Malvern 2012.

contrast is the open nature that comes with sharing personal stories. Residents are interested to hear about how life has worked out for others. An example of this is the annual Malvern Church street party where from the stage, any sermonic language is ignored, yet all eyes are turned when someone shares his or her own experience.

Little Room for the Immigrant

Australia historically has become a new home for many nationalities. Malvern though is a unique anomaly. European and Australian ancestry accounts for the top five responses with English being the highest at 29.8 percent of the population. Only 1.2 percent of the population was born in a non-European country, and 75.4 percent were born in Australia.³⁴ Further, there are no Aboriginal people or any of Aboriginal descent residing in the suburb. It is easy to see then that Malvern retains a strong European feel and cultural influences.

Sport as Taking the Place of Religion

Adelaide has always had a love affair with sport, particularly Australian Rules Football and Cricket. This love of sport is now enhanced by a renewed attitude to personal fitness. Some of the contributions to this rise could be attributed to the popularity of weight-loss shows and the allure of a fit and athletic body. It seems as if many people have a personal trainer, wear lycra or go to the gym. On a Sunday morning there are many runners on the footpaths and in the parks. It is clear this is another influence generated from the postmodern culture whereby the personal takes precedent

³⁴ Ibid.

over all things. The net result is that sport has taken over religion as the main object of worship in the culture.

Church Only as Tradition for Easter and Christmas

Census statistics indicate that over half of Malvern residents consider themselves as Christian and indicate that they belong to four major denominations.³⁵ The “no religion” category was chosen by 23.1 percent.³⁶ The fascinating thing about these categories is that only one of the two churches in the suburb rates in the top four and that one only accounts for 10.4 percent. This means either many people travel outside of the suburb to worship, which is quite possible, or that people chose a historical linking to a denomination but do not have a pattern of attendance.

Given attendances across the traditional churches it seems that the second option is far more likely. Further, watching the patterns over Christmas and Easter it seems more likely that those who have a leaning towards faith, but not a regular attendance, would use these key seasonal times to attend. Personal observation would confirm familiar local faces at services over Easter and Christmas but no other involvement throughout the year. The conclusion is that the Church is relegated into the role of tradition in key seasonal events almost like putting up a Christmas tree. While there is much hand wringing over downplaying of the Church, much of it is due to the inability of previous churches to engage culture in a meaningful and significant way. Well-educated and well-resourced Malvern residents simply voted with their feet and found meaning elsewhere.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

Malvern holds a unique place in the city of Adelaide. It is wealthy, well-educated and resourced. Many know something about faith from past exposure. However a closer look reveals issues of loneliness, stress and a lack of safe community spaces. People fearful of the unknown retreat into homes and only invite those closest to share that space. Trust is an issue. Children, detached from parents but learning consumerism and body worship will make up the future of the suburb and as yet it is unclear how they will ultimately react. If attendances at Easter and Christmas are anything to go by, Malvern Uniting Church has a real chance to communicate the Gospel, but it all depends on a culturally sensitive way.

CHAPTER 2

CHURCH CONTEXT

Malvern Uniting Church has a unique place in the life of Malvern suburb. It has been a place of worship every Sunday for the last 125 years. Its history is one of struggle and faithfulness as it sought to be a living witness to the Gospel of Jesus in the area.

The Methodist Heritage: Thirty-five Years of Union

As denominations go the Uniting Church in Australia is an infant. It was formed in 1977 out of a union of the Methodist Church in Australia, the Congregational Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church in Australia. The whole of the Methodist Church entered into the union, while some parts of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches remained out of union. The inaugural event was celebrated at a public gathering, televised nationwide on the government channel. Taking over one hundred years to negotiate, the Uniting Church in Australia is truly an Australian church.

The Echo of the Building: Organ and Pulpit

Malvern Uniting Church has a strong Methodist background. The foundation stone laid by the Wesleyan preacher Mark Guy Pearce in 1893 is indicative of the

heritage.¹ Early pictures show a brand new building on dusty dirt streets. Faithful Methodist entrepreneurs designed the suburb. Significantly in their vision, no allowance was made for any place that served alcohol.² The building is a fascinating story of the sacrifice and dedication of faithful, early south Australian Methodists.

Upon entering the church it is not hard to be arrested by two significant symbols of Methodism: the high pulpit (preaching) and the dominant organ (music). Both are at the front of the building with all pews facing. They stand above all things. To the traditionalist this communicates a strong sense of home, as this is the way it should be. Yet to others this communicates a strong sense of Christendom, as if this is the focal point for the faith. It belies a faith that is attached to the building, one that says come here to experience Jesus. This was a valid theory for the first hundred years of the church's existence. Malvern Church has been a bastion of the Christian faith in the suburb. In fact it is one of only two churches in the suburb. Many call this place home, and they find comfort, solace and hope within its walls. But this underlying culture of "build it and they will come" or more to the point "play it/preach it and they will come" has of late significantly hampered the mission of Malvern Church. Indeed much ground was lost. So much that by the late 1980s it was in serious decline and in the mid-1990s it nearly died.

Rapid Growth in the Last Eighteen Years

In 1995, an experienced and successful minister was settled into the struggling church. The word struggling is somewhat a misnomer; the church was on its knees and

¹ Linn, *Malvern Uniting Church*, 1.

² This remains true today.

this was the last chance.³ Phil Carr set about rebuilding the life of the church. Coming from Adelaide Central Mission, he brought a significant amount of missional experience to the leadership of the church. Fitting in with the symbols of Methodism, Carr used preaching and music to his advantage and quickly attracted new members. The reforming of the choir was another part of this reanimation of the past.

The Change from a Small to a Regional Church

Quickly Malvern Church established itself again as a significant place in the suburb. Carr was a charismatic leader who rallied an aging community and had the ability to attract others, some of whom were dissatisfied with their current churches or had been associated with Malvern Church but never attended regularly. He skillfully brought divided factions together and within a few years. Malvern Church was a viable place of worship. Along with membership and attendance renewal, staff members and key volunteers were recruited to aid in the running of the church.

Yet in this re-growth of the church, mission to those outside of the four walls was mostly overlooked. The focus of ministry was mainly to insiders. Considering the timing and the state of the church this was appropriate. The church needed to consolidate and it was wise to attract those closest to the church community. On the plus side there were several things that opened the church up to the wider community. They were the regular invitation of choirs to sing during the 10.30 am worship service and the further promotion of the building as a desirable place for weddings. The choir strategy was put in place to increase the number of attendees at worship and thus give a sense of growth. Its effect

³ Linn, *Malvern Uniting Church*, 26. The close by old Methodist Church at Parkside, just a few kilometers away, had not long been turned into a block of flats.

was to make the church well known in musical circles. The promotion of the building as a wedding venue meant that another group of the community came into contact with the church. Some of the wedding couples in time began attending and even more returned with their children for infant baptism. Growth was slow, but steady.

Early in the resurgence an evening service began. It equated to a congregation plant, drawing resources from the 10.30 am service to attract a different type of member: a younger age set. Again the focus was on the two bastions of Methodism: music and preaching. Although the music was deliberately modern in an attempt to be relevant to a younger generation, it was met with mediocre success, but engendered a loyal following.

All of this work over the last twelve or so years was particularly focused on a certain type of individual—a person who was church-ed. It rested on a model that worked well for many years past, but increasingly was no longer a viable option. The problem was that it knew nothing of “going,” only of others “coming.”

The Developing Missional Focus of the Last Five Years

The last six years has seen even more change. Due to a change in minister a missional mindset emerged as a higher priority. As more members were added resources were at hand to engage further with the community and enable the church to reach out. New ideas were trialed and refined as mission became more the norm than the exception. The culture of mission developed and is seen as an integral part of what this church does. One fault that is prevalent is the depersonalizing of the task of mission. This is seen in an attitude whereby people are happy to serve as a team but not take mission into their own personal spaces. The church has yet to take the next step of personal mission.

Overriding Values and Stated Mission

As with many churches, Malvern Church struggles to identify its real priorities. The values it espouses are not necessarily those that it gives priority to. The years have seen the struggle to bring about a clear vision and purpose.

Emerging Strategy: Areas of Purpose, Strategic Plans and Three Directions

As mission became a higher priority it was time to discern new directions for the future. Groups of interested people began to meet, pray and develop a new strategy. Currently, Malvern's website shows the six areas of action for this church: worship, discipleship, ministry, community, service and evangelism.⁴ A three-year plan was agreed to in 2010, in order to facilitate growth in lacking areas and firm up strengths. Projects such as the planning of a men's shed were developed in order to continue mission and service. A playground was built to further attract families to the playgroup and a new website was commissioned. Much of that three-year plan has been achieved and work is continuing on the next key direction for a new phase. Over time it was found that six action areas were somewhat hard to remember so in recent days the six became three simple words: up, in and out, symbolizing worship, discipleship and mission. All six of the previous plan is now adequately found in the new three.

Unstated Values: Tradition and Comfort: Missions as Chaplains not Missionaries

Stated values and actions plans are one thing; unstated values are wholly different and complex. It is oft been said that culture eats strategy for breakfast. One of the great

⁴ Malvern Church, "6 Core Themes," Malvern Church, <http://www.malvernuc.com/iamnew/5-core-themes.html> (accessed March 14, 2014).

problems for an educated, wealthy church in a higher socioeconomic suburb is the high expectations on employed staff. As the simple phrase encapsulates, ministers become chaplains not missionaries. While it is a great privilege to care for people it can develop into a burden that greatly hampers ministry as it stymies mission and curtails the scope of ministry. The assumptions are that staff attends to the family needs of the congregation over and above anything else. Traditional values are on display and they are significantly complex to untangle. The difficulty is one of relationships as it is these people who give generously and more often than not, bring the people resources to undertake mission. Obviously this is a common theme where the culture has been set for a long time. The effect is that a church can be simply caring for itself. It becomes a comfortable place to be but the culture overrides the vision and unstated values win the day.

Tradition plays a big part at Malvern Uniting. Obviously a church that is over 125 years old has significant rituals, customs and habits. Expectations for how worship is conducted, and to what standard, are clear. A pejorative look indicates that although decreasing in importance, comfort is still high on the list of wants. Comfort includes a variety of things like familiarity, minimization of the new, how ritual is performed and reduction in challenge to be personally involved with non-Christians. Comfort has a habit of being the plumb line when traditions are established.

Malvern's belief in church as institution is a cultural value that warrants discussion. The recent Reveal Survey shows that Malvern has a strong core of committed people who are faithful to the ongoing life of the church.⁵ However, many of those

⁵ Engage International, *Reveal: Spiritual Life Survey Report*, Malvern Uniting Data Pack, March 2013, (Chicago: Willow Creek, 2013).

surveyed indicated their low participation in personal spiritual practices. In fact the church had a lower than average spiritual life than the median score on the database. It seems that Malvern members are more likely to be committed to the church as an institution than a personal relationship with Jesus.

The Move from Sundays Only to a Seven-day-a-week Church

It was under Carr that the phrase “seven day a week church” was first coined. It was a move away from the days of “open Sunday only,” As the years progressed it became a mantra of sorts for the church and began to help change the culture in subtle ways. For instance the church council began to develop things that would enact the phrase. A cancer support group became reality and that was linked with a counseling centre. The church began to run holiday kid’s clubs and found volunteers to run the office on regular hours. Playgroups were established and simple things like coffee machines were purchased to engage with the culture. These things brought more activity into the life of the buildings, but still “come” was the overwhelming message.

The Struggle of Mission—an Australian Wide Problem

The Australian church seems to have a great problem in reaching out with the Gospel in a way that helps others believe. Many churches are skilled at welcoming visitors and those who enter into a church, but meeting people where they are at is a different scenario. Various models have been tried, from the revival tent, door knocking, to acts of service. The Salvation Army, arguably best known for their relief work, is good at social and economic problems, but seems unable to verbally share the Gospel. Sporting

teams, adverts on the backs of buses, prayer breakfasts and street preaching has all been tried but there is little success in cracking the Australian code of evangelism. It might just be that the way forward is relational, one-on-one, rather than a broader approach.

The struggle of mission is also a discipleship battle on the frontier of finances. There is tension in spending between meeting congregational needs and those who do not yet belong. Ministry is expensive and churches like to see money well spent. With few effective results shown for evangelism it is no wonder funding is rarely given.

Australians Like Jesus but not the Church

Jesus in Australian culture is a much-admired figure. He has enamored himself to the culture as a man of character and compassion. Certainly Australians like and respect Jesus.⁶ The Church though is a different thing altogether. Some of this stems from the early days of European settlement, when priests acted in dual roles as clergy on Sunday, with talk of God, and criminal judges on the other days, with talk of lash and hanging. Couple that with more recent child sexual abuse cases of clergy and there is a deep distrust of the Church in the form of institutional religion.⁷ Bouma comments, “If you want to peddle trust in God you must provide a trustworthy community.”⁸ The disparity between Jesus and his Church is vast. Australians like him but not his followers.

⁶ NCLS Occasional Paper, “A Question of Beliefs,” NCLS, <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2336> (accessed January 7, 2014)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 116.

Church is Okay for Women and Children but not for Men

For those who have sympathy with the established church it is still seen as a crutch. The vast majority of church attenders are women and children; men being the anomaly in mainstream denominations.⁹ Australia was not founded for religious freedom and this combined with the early treatment of convicts by clergy led to a significant distrust of the church. Men often see church as for “wowsers” and not at all like the ANZAC image construction of maleness. Adding to this, those of the Christian faith tend to be the older end of the population.¹⁰ Malvern Uniting Church has worked hard at this aspect of culture and tended to offer a more muscular Christianity that calls men to accountability and the development of character.

Street Parties and Mission Weeks: Examples of Success and Failure

With the above context and factors in mind Malvern Church has made attempts to engage locally in outreach. At the beginning of 2009, an idea was formed to hold a week of evangelism. Rather than start with baby steps, this week of evangelism was a “no holds barred” event. Called Mal/fUNction, picking up on the name of the two churches, Malvern and Unley, it attempted to engage the church community with members of the local community and wider. The week set out to connect with every age group in one way or another. Activities were held such as dinners, a world record attempt in partnership with World Vision, door-knocking asking for prayer requests, prayer nights and free giveaways at the local shopping centre. Finally, there was a Saturday afternoon

⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰ Ibid., 68.

street party, where the street in front of the church was blocked off. It is estimated that this week connected with over 2000 people of all ages, mostly from the immediate area. For the church community this engendered a sense of purpose about mission and it took the culture from one of inward-looking to beginning to look outside.

In 2011, the week was repeated with different emphases and activities. This second event met with less success and lower levels of volunteer involvement. Still, many people were connected to Malvern Church and the culture of the church continued to move in the direction of outreach.

Both events added significant education to the area of mission done as a church. To say it was a jar to the church culture is to understate the effect; it caused a significant change in direction and a self-belief that this can be done. It harnessed many people under one cause and more than half participated in things they previously had not experienced.

The downside to the weeks of evangelism, apart from some lack-luster take up, has been a theological one. It is a significant problem, and one that is mostly unrecognized by the majority. It is simply the lack of belief that “it [the Gospel] is the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16). There are many factors that feed into this theological quandary; a postmodern mind, significant levels of education and finances, lack of experience with God, a disbelief in hell, the validation of individual story and the list goes on. The full effect is outplayed in that very few people see the need to share their faith. Without any impetus to be a living witness to a Jesus-honoring lifestyle, many are content to just participate, as this is what the church does. But this "live and let live"

attitude of postmodernism, and lack of clarity around the Gospel, simply put; undercuts the whole point of mission. Middle-class church attenders who believe they have never really done anything bad to warrant “real salvation” and who do not have faith in the truth that Jesus can change lives are more like a social club than a church.

The quandary, both theologically and practically, is how to educate a church that is comfortable to be uncomfortable. The great challenge is to see God at work in all parts of life and then to name it. This is the single biggest stumbling block for mission not only at Malvern Church but Australia wide. If churchgoers are not clear that the Gospel affects all of life and are passionate about sharing the good news, then evangelism and conversion will be sporadic at best. The task at hand is facilitating a move of the Holy Spirit and augmenting a shift from just being servants to being servants with a message.

One of the biggest outcomes for Malvern Church and the one that has had the most ongoing impact is “The Street Party.” Essentially since early 2009 Malvern Church has run a street party every December. It has been successful in engaging the community. The most recent event, held on a day of inclement weather, saw over 1,000 attendees and over sixty volunteers. What was realized is that the Malvern suburb has no places that provide for a large community gathering. The success of the street party suggests that the community see the church as a safe environment and a place that provides “good things.” While people remain suspicious of the Church and might not want to go every week, they are certainly willing to participate in one-off events. It is these events that have led to people attending worship at Easter and Christmas and others engaging with the church on different levels.

Malvern Member as a Typical Adelaide Christian

With mission being a significant problem for Australian churches, there are similarities between Christians in Adelaide. Culture plays a big part in shaping the thoughts and patterns of the city's Christians. Members of Malvern Church have the same struggle as others in terms of sharing faith.

Middle-class Demographics

Much of Malvern is middle class. Although a high proportion of church members come from other suburbs, most come from the same subset in Adelaide's culture. A brief scan of the church address list shows many come from the eastern, middle-class suburbs of Adelaide. There is a certain similarity between Christians across the suburbs. This group of people is well educated and resourced; many come from good homes that have afforded good upbringings. They work hard and are diligent at their jobs or studies. As is common today, many of the grandparents spend a large portion of their time looking after grandchildren. Most have lived a clean life with no significant issues or problems. They could be called model citizens and contribute well to society.

Theologically, a Malvern Christian is conservative and broadly evangelical in the main. Some would subscribe to such theologies as espoused by Bishop Spong or even some of the more radical thinkers like Hitchens. But these are the exception not the norm. Sadly, while these members are well educated in the social arena, when it comes to faith there is a paucity of knowledge. Many still hold a basic Sunday school understanding of the biblical witness. The Reveal Survey pointed out that only 23 percent read their Bibles

daily and 36 percent pray for guidance.¹¹ This is very low against other surveyed churches. Casual conversations show that hardly any read the Old Testament. Outside of a programmed Bible study many do not read any book on Christian thought. While members say personal faith is important, the Reveal Survey tells of a lack of motivation to engage with key elements that would grow faith. This is a fascinating conclusion for self-sufficient, high-achieving people. These are people who value quality; yet for some reason these things do not apply to growing faith. Interesting, service rates high on the survey, showing that the members want to do well, if in fact they do not think well.

Sources of Identity and the Reticence to Share Faith

An overarching issue for Malvern Church is its members' reticence to share personal faith. This strong aversion for faith sharing comes from a number of areas. A driving factor is that personal faith sharing brings significant discomfort. Conscious of their lack of Christian knowledge, feelings of inadequacy heighten when contemplating how to answer a non-believer's questions. Moreover they see all stories as equally valid and do not want to come across as judgmental or bigoted. An Australian value as put by Bouma is that "Australians are intolerant of the intolerant."¹² Being of the same identity as those who are non-church also creates issues. Holding similar values makes any lifestyle contrast somewhat blurred. One of the key stumbling blocks was shown in the Reveal Survey: simply, the Gospel has not been allowed to make enough impact to clarify an obvious difference from the surrounding culture. These are good people with

¹¹ Engage International, *Reveal*.

¹² Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 47.

kind hearts, who like community and ritual. Their desire to help others is commendable but it lacks a depth of personal faith that enables Gospel sharing.

Sources of identity are complex for Malvern Christians. It indicates core values and where their time and money is spent. For most people what they do for a work life or schooling gives significant identity. Further education, the status of their family, and those of their partners, adds to the mix. Social standing also comes into play. Some get it from the status of the suburb they live in and from how they display their wealth—cars, homes, gardens, clothes and accessories. Others even get it from their local sporting teams and social media status. All these things feed into a subjective identity. However there are many who struggle for a Christ-focused life, where identity is drawn from him. They are faithful in worship, give generously and struggle to throw off the trappings of wealth. The Reveal Survey showed this group of people clearly and categorises them in the “Christ Centered” group. They made up 19 percent of those surveyed, quite low in comparison. Identity issues undercut much of the church’s effort to share faith.

Nice Christianity as the Biggest Barrier

There is an unstated view and a cultural value that in the past underpinned much of Malvern Church’s actions. That is Christianity should be nice. It is one of the biggest issues that Malvern members share as they struggle to witness to Jesus. Nice Christianity is what it appears to be. It is a non-challenge, low cost, highly graced version of the Gospel that seeks to neither make demands nor cause offense to anyone. Some of the thinking is that people would come if they wanted to be a part of church; there is no need to invite others and interrupt their lives. Of course there is conflict, but it has been over

minor things, for example keeping the children quiet during the service and the laying of carpet that could dampen the sound of the organ. Nice Christianity is a cultural expectation as much from the local community as the church community. Nice Christianity does not mention sin, the radical need for a savior nor an undue reference to the cross. Many more people asking what is the point of mission, deep down have to wrestle with their assumed version of Christianity. With the last six years of relentless missional activity this value is changing but still remains a threat to mission. It is the default position and a significant issue for change.

Leadership: A Blend of Church Council and Paid Staff

Historically Malvern has been clergy led and for much of its history retained two full-time ministers. The last seven years has seen the employment of non-ordained staff that assumed some of a classic minister's role. Normally, a Uniting Church is governed by a church council consisted of elders and councilors. Growing a staff team has changed the function of the classic Uniting Church governing structure.

The transition from a minister-based leadership with the support of the church council to a team-based approach has been smooth. The staff takes care of the day-to-day running of operations, the property complex and the worship services. They respond to direction set by the council as they enact forward planning. In a sense the council say, "Where we are going" and the staff decide, "How we are to get there." This has been an equitable partnership and one that is deeply trusting. On numerous occasions the council is tempted to delve into the details of day-to-day management rather than the long-term goal. This tends to cause complications and mismanagement. One issue that has been

found to be significant is that of communication between the council and the staff. This has been resolved by a weekly email that is sent out to all key leaders briefly describing the day-to-day happenings of the management. Further, the council has appointed a management group of four to meet weekly with the minister so that some decisions can be fast tracked.

Some decisions however, are still made in the car park. Indeed there resides a lingering culture that believes all people should know what is going on in the life of the church and should be consulted to make decisions. This culture and these behind-the-door decisions are increasingly a thing of the past. As in any church there are some who are gatekeepers. Malvern is fortunate that these are “open gate keepers” with high permission giving attitudes. One of the turning points to eliminate multiple decision-making opportunities was the bringing together of all the various money accounts. Historically all the different groups kept their own bank accounts, with small sums of money distributed haphazardly and thus small decisions made without any reference to the whole. By bringing these monies into one central fund, still clearly identifiable, it removed any power that small groups had to enforce decisions.

The final say on all decisions still resides with the minister. There is wisdom in this as the minister has the clearest picture of where the church is at and where it is headed. Having a foot in both the staff and the council the minister is well placed to gather up all the contributing factors and make informed decisions. Having learned from the past, Malvern has chosen what could be best described as a “leader consultative team

based decision making approach.” The minister is shy of making lone decisions and always involves others.

How a Budget Reflects Ministry

The church council has oversight of the church’s finances. Along with the treasurer they administer and track the financial status of the church. Malvern’s budget is heavily augmented towards ministry and low on spending on property. Financially debt-free it is in a unique position to fund mission. A significant proportion is spent on actual staffing. Staff is the key catalyst to the outreach programs run by the church. Monies spent on staff have a direct reflection on how much mission is undertaken.

The Vital Need for Every-member Ministry

While Malvern employs staff, everything falls and stands on volunteers. This is true for the ongoing life of the church but particularly true for the mission of the church as a faith-sharing community. Here in lies the problem. Members do not see that their ministry exists primarily outside of the church. Ministry is easily compartmentalized into a few hours a week. The vital need is for all members to realise the unique place in which God has put them and do ministry there. A church that survives into tomorrow depends on every-member ministry, working in their context.

Unique Opportunities for an Active Membership

The core need to be met by Malvern Uniting Church is how to engage with the local community, and the community its members are a part of beyond the church, in a way that legitimately shares faith in Jesus (what). It is a whole-church exercise in that it

represents a significant change in culture. It is driven by the minister and staff holding the vision and then hoping that early adaptors will grab hold of the new change (who). To this end it is a slow process as any culture change happens over a number of years as more people catch hold of what the realised future could be (when). This church has a taste of what growth looks like and what a healthy church feels like and they like it (how). It is a significant departure from current practice as to realise a culture of becoming a faith-sharing community it will cause members to actually speak out their faith, not just live it out (why). The church has the capacity to meet the ministry challenge. It certainly has some struggles and issues to work through. However, even in small ways, it shows it is willing to step out and do mission to the local community. The church has many members in a variety of settings who, if able to capture the vision and live differently in the culture, can augment significant change for the Kingdom.

The Spiritual Poverty of Affluent Australians

There are a number of obstacles in the way for the vision of this conversion strategy being realised in the church and suburb. Both have an impact on the outcome. The picture painted is of an affluent Australian who has almost everything. Members of the suburb are self-made and confident in their abilities with little need for anything outside of their own resources. God is compartmentalized and simply given a cursory nod, never impacting on day-to-day life.

Yet stress is high, and current issues have taken their toll. People are alone and fearful. It is here that spiritual poverty shows up. Malvern Church members are earning

the right to speak into these areas of the community. The next step depends on members moving beyond their reservations and trepidation to share the Gospel with words.

The Safe Places of Backyards and Homes for Conversations

With very little safe places for community to gather, the backyard is now filling that requirement even though somewhat limited to family and invited guest. For the suburb this is the best place that the Gospel can be legitimately shared. This is the place where the barriers are down and that honesty can be found. Many bridges need to be built in order for that to happen. The church needs to continue to earn the right to speak the Gospel to the community. Individuals within the church are always the ones who take up the opportunities that come from larger church events and personalize the Gospel.

Twenty-to-fifty Years Olds, the Missing Generations in the Church

An age profile of Malvern Church quickly establishes that while there is a good representation across the ages a large portion is on the upper end of the age bracket.¹³ There is a gap that includes the twenty-to-fifty year olds but becomes acute with the thirty to fifty year olds. This is in contrast with the local area where the mean age is 44.¹⁴ It is this group that Malvern Church must direct its efforts to reach.

Conclusion

While a bastion of faith in the suburb, Malvern Church must not rest on its laurels. To do so will bring death. It must further reanimate its mission into the local

¹³ This data was taken from a personal database kept of demographics at Malvern Church.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2011 Census Quick Stats: Malvern."

community in a way that is appropriate and sensitive. If Malvern Church continues along a missional path as a community and as individuals it has a high chance of thriving in the suburb. It however must throw off some of its cultural trappings and drink deeply from the Gospel.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In determining how to move Malvern Uniting, an institutional church from the safety of the Billabong to the dangers of the river's edge several key resources are used. Seven sources have been consulted to enable further thinking in three particular areas: being the Body of Christ, missional living for every member ministry and evangelism as a natural way of life. These books are examined to help Malvern Uniting to be a faith sharing community.

Being the Body of Christ

The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission by Donald Bloesch

Donald Bloesch uses ecclesiology to investigate in the life of the Church in current and past practices. In drawing from a wide pool of Christian thinkers across the ecumenical landscape he examines significant theological issues for the practice of the Church. Each theological issue is treated to a wide-ranging examination that helps the reader understand the scope of the topic. Essentially as a theologian Bloesch is interested in right thought, which leads to right practice.

Bloesch was chosen specifically to help with an understanding of being the Body of Christ. This topic is in reference to being the Body as a missional organism. In particular one that fosters discipleship that releases members into missional ministry.

On several occasions Bloesch uses the phrase Confessing Church. In keeping with classical thought this broadly means confessing Christ as Lord.¹ This, he remarks is “one that will bodily confess the claims of Christ in the face of heresies and heterodoxies of our age.”² This phrase seems to sum up much of his idea on the role of the Church in the world. Evangelical in nature he stands firmly on the Word of God. While he is interested in those of non-orthodox views and tends to meander into inquisition-style dialogue, he has a passion for the role of the Church in the world. He is convinced of its place as a key member in God's economy of salvation. Moreover, concerning the mission of the Church, whereby its members maintain a vital connection with the world. He mentions the necessity of living a Gospel life as a witness to the world, and he cites acts of service, teaching and prayer as examples of these.³

However Bloesch continues to reiterate that the mission of the Church is to speak. In agreeing with Barth, he comments, “Our mission is to herald the good news of what God has done for us in Christ.”⁴ In a cultural setting whereby the Church is often seen as doing good things and serving the world this emphasis is significant. While not novel, it is warming to read a theologian voice a strong and repeated opinion on the actual

¹ Donald Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 266.

² Ibid., 34.

³ Ibid., 247.

⁴ Ibid., 60.

proclamation of the Gospel. Biblically it is easily sustainable. Jesus did many good works, healings and miracles. But also on many occasions he spoke the good news of God's actions in the world. The Sermon on the Mount, possibly Jesus' greatest teachings, were just that, words that conveyed the truth of how God desires all people to live. In following the Master the Church's role is to confess this faith in God, but to confess - speak, how God sees life working out for humanity and how God is working to redeem all creation.

It is this confession that drives the mission of the Church. Confession keeps the Church focused on the task that God has placed it to do. Accordingly, Bloesch sees that confession is pivotal for the ongoing life and health of the Church. He comments "The hope of the church today lies neither in a revamped apologetics nor in an innovative church growth program but in a vibrant confession of faith that cuts across all denominational and sectarian lines and that speaks to the burning issues of the time."⁵ Malvern Church must come to grips with what it means to confess faith as the Body of Christ. In confessing faith, the full impact of discipleship is discovered as Jesus becomes Lord of all. This teaches the Church that the life of faith is not just good works, even good mission works, but voicing God's agenda.

This call to mission with words is counter cultural and frightening for Malvern Church. It does not fit with "nice Christianity," nor equate to comfortable faith. For many, this call of discipleship is too much and the cost is too great. Yet being the Body of Christ means that it is all under the Lordship of Christ: how Christ wants it, so it shall be. Malvern Church must submit to this discipline.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

Unfortunately Bloesch makes a glaring omission for the mission of the Church. In a volume on ecclesiology it is somewhat odd that he does not include a chapter on the topic of mission. While it is clear that he assumes mission and comments on it widely, throughout other parts of the book there is no clear discussion; nor is there the usual ecumenical treatment on the topic. Aside from this Bloesch contributes significant material to the missional emphasis for Malvern Church.

Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation by Dwight Zscheile

Cultivating Sent Communities is a multi-authored work on mission in today's world. In particular it focuses its attention on the formation of the communities seeking to do mission. As such it is unique in the landscape of missional literature. The main thrust of the essay collection centres on the way communities participate in mission, a participation that is vital for the deepening of their own spirituality. In many ways this volume is far more than a book on doing, it is a discussion on the Church and it relates to the question of being.

The book traces a grand theme: the Church must see itself as an agent of God in redemptive work in the world. This requires the Church to let go of its self-preservation and move towards where God is already at work in the community at large. One story illustrates this clearly: "Then, after a while, they always say, 'Now wait a minute, this thing is going to cost us our life.' Right. That's the point. It's messing up their nice, safe, comfortable church."⁶ This letting go is also about picking up classic spiritual formation

⁶ Richard Osmer, "Formation in the Missional Church: Building Deep Connections between Ministries of Upbuilding and Sending," in *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, ed. Dwight J. Zscheile (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 39.

practices. These practices involve the whole of life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the uncomfortable work of spiritual formation and discipleship that forms mission. Zscheile raises significant issues even though there is a slight underlying sniff of paternalistic thought.⁷ Nevertheless this is a large growth area for churches that are working on mission. Mission can be easily seen as going, doing and returning to a regular chosen place. However, the Church is being provoked into thinking that God is active beyond the bounds of the church's walls and, more to the point, invites it to reside there as a faith formation practice. It is an uncomfortable place to serve him. Jesus also identifies this as a problem in his ministry; he said to those considering following him: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). This is startling news as churches transition from doing mission to living the mission in every part of their life. What is unfolding here is that deeper formation, the uncomfortable place of the work of the Holy Spirit, begins with the believer first. Formation leads to a deeper, more lasting mission.

Allen Hilton's chapter "Living into the Big Story" is particularly helpful for this project.⁸ He describes the reticence of Abram, Israel and the early church - all being anti-missional in foci. As he points out they are stunning in their stark denial of the call on them as godly ambassadors and holders of the divine blessing. He comments, "Time and again God's people, whether Israel or the earliest Christian church, must be dragged

⁷ Dwight J. Zscheile, "A Missional Theology of Spiritual Formation," in *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, ed. Dwight J. Zscheile (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 19.

⁸ Allen Hilton, "Living into the Big Story: The Missional Trajectory of Scripture in Congregational Life," in *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, ed. Dwight J. Zscheile (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 81-101.

kicking and screaming toward the nations.”⁹ His treatment of the biblical narrative is enlightening. Indeed it is quite encouraging for mission-minded leaders who strive to help congregations be more mission oriented and continue to be frustrated by inactivity and disinterest. His commentary indicates that this is not a new phenomena or a twenty-first century cultural issue. Moreover it is the nature of the history of God’s people down through time. The answer though is the living of Scripture; it is not seeing it as an object to be studied but a life to be immersed in. It is an experience of the faithful; the people of God are to live the story. This might well be one of the answers for Malvern Church: first, for leadership in the recognition of the hardship faced in moving a people group towards mission; second, with the expressed strategy to immerse the congregation into God’s story as a move towards this one part of spiritual formation.

This book points to the need for disciples of Jesus to be just that, disciples. Not just doers and program managers, but to live the Gospel in an uncomfortable way. This means that members of the church are not consumers but participants in God’s story. Ultimately, all things going well, disciples will make disciples.

Missional Living: Every Member Ministry

Salt, Light and a City by Graham Hill

This book takes a very different look at ecclesiology. Hill is interested in the why of mission ecclesiology rather than the common how. His desire is that the Church thinks about mission as an essence of being, not an add-on afterthought. The unique take on this topic comes as Hill examines twelve theologians from different ecumenical perspectives

⁹ Ibid., 87.

and backgrounds, and forms a broad picture of what the landscape on missional thinking looks like. Part one works its way through four broad categories of Roman, Eastern, Protestant and Free churches to pinpoint their unique take on mission in the context of the Church. His second part brings a thoughtful treatment of mission in dialogue with the aforementioned theologians. He engages with them to bring more light on the thinking behind mission and to see how integral it is with the plan of God for the Church. His primary point is that the Church's nature is intended to be missional. He comments "It is missional at its very core - reflecting the missional nature and purposes of God."¹⁰ He follows the thread of this line through these thinkers and helps the Church grapple with a self-understanding of the nature of mission.

To answer the why question on mission the book moves into various areas, particularly the topics of community, Christology, pneumatology and the Trinity. As Hill explores these themes in conversation with the twelve theologians, he attempts to distill the essence of the subject as it applies to mission theology. On the topic of the mission nature of the Church, he elaborates this in some detail. His thesis is because Christians follow the missionary God, the *Missio Dei*, all their activities should be missionary in nature. Indeed they are "expressions of the essential missional nature of the church."¹¹ It is as he would ascertain not an additive to, but the core being of the Church. It is what the Church is. As such it is in keeping with the "messianic mission of Jesus Christ."¹² Further, he argues that Scripture should be interpreted in the context of mission as the

¹⁰ Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), xvii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹² *Ibid.*

expression of the missionary God from the Old Testament through the ministry of Jesus and into the work of the Spirit. Thus churches that do not follow a missionary road are essentially lacking in their full design and original intent. To be true examples of the Kingdom of God in the world and to live out the Gospel, churches have to follow the Messiah on mission.

Hill writes a complicated and involved book on mission. Yet he gets under the skin of contemporary, pragmatic ecclesiastical practice. He calls for reform in thinking of the way church is lived out. Indeed this project pauses to dwell a little longer on theology before dashing into the “how do we do this.” The questions raised by Hill on the unreflective practice of the Church are as significant as they are deep. Reflections on the movement of God throughout history and how this gives direction to current missional practice are sadly lacking. The problem for Malvern is of course, it is playing a well-rehearsed script. Malvern Church has done the same thing for so long that at its core it does not really know another way. His agreeing with Yoda that Constantinianism continues to have an effect is well grounded.¹³ Hill's provocative push towards a thoughtful and theologically accurate ecclesiology that leads to biblically-sound mission would shake many churches' foundation if taken seriously, Malvern Church included.

On several occasions Hill seems to overstate his position on mission. He largely overlooks the Church's role in worship as one of its core responses to the God of mission. Nor does he give much credence to discipleship as a holiness response to God at work in Christ through the power of the Spirit. These omissions, it is argued, give a biased, somewhat slanted view of mission that is unhelpful for a balanced view of church life.

¹³ Ibid., 171.

Moreover Malvern Church sees itself best when it meets God in worship, is continually transformed by discipleship and then reaches out in mission. These three things when held together in tension seem to be the best response to Gods activities in the world.

Deep Church by Jim Belcher

Jim Belcher explores the landscape of the contemporary Western Church and the division between traditional and emergent forms of church. Examining the strengths and weakness to both aspects, he forms a third way. Picking up on C.S Lewis' phraseology he dubs this third way “deep church.” Belcher wrestles with what it means to be church now, albeit from a strongly reformed position. Although dabbling in reconciliation between the two “warring” sides of church, Belcher does not seem overly convinced that this could be a reality. Rather, he firmly believes there is a third way that adheres to the classic doctrines of faith but is also contextually relevant. Indeed he gives examples of how this looks from his own church-plant experience.

Belcher gives some serious consideration to the emergent church movement and its main spokespersons. He lines these up against traditional forms of church expression and evaluates both the strength and weakness on each side. Over time he decides that some parts of the emergent movement come up short on aspects of theology and authority. They have moved beyond orthodoxy for the sake of connection. Further he also critiques the traditional church for its inability to engage in a contemporary culture with relevance and for its enclave mentality. One side it seems, is too relevant and the other not relevant enough. This is how he comes to the third way; “There must be a better way” is the sense the reader can feel leaping off the pages.

On several occasions Belcher uses the phrase institutional and organic as the description of where the Church could be and how it could function.¹⁴ This, he explains, happens by remaining embedded in the classic tenants of orthodoxy for belief and authority, but being fluid in its practice. Belcher believes this way can strike a delicate balance. Malvern Church clearly leans towards the traditional aspects, though slightly to the side of the reformed tradition. His critique of this type of church fits well for Malvern. His insights on the bounded-set opposed to the centre-set churches cut to the bone of Malvern's past life and residual culture.¹⁵ Traditional churches are good at building fences with small gates. Malvern is bound by tradition and assumed values of what the Gospel is, and even more so, how it can be conveyed. Belcher shows the theological inadequacy and the paucity of personal transformation for an inward-looking church culture. Not wanting to rid the Church of its rich heritage, nor move from its authority structures, he challenges the traditional church to learn from the efforts of emergents.

It is easy to see how this book has received stinging criticism. Belcher's truth telling for all parties does not make friends on either side of the equation. However, the book's usefulness for this project is indeed large. On the positive side, Malvern Church has a rich heritage, one that has stood for over a century. It is steeped in what Belcher terms "the great tradition," that is the authority of Scripture and the formation of the important creeds. This is an important bedrock. However Malvern has the classic issue that many other traditional churches have, that is a one-day-a-week Christianity. A robust

¹⁴ Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 175.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

organic view of church embraces the tenants of the faith in every aspect of a believer's life, but then expands the borders into real mission. It is the body acting wherever they might be, work, sport or home. With the traditional church depending heavily on enlightenment rationalism it has easily fallen into allowing members to create separate boxes for different spheres of life, rather than seeing the Kingdom of God spilling over into all. Malvern Church is struggling in this area as it attempts to become more of an organic church where all members live the Kingdom of God, each day. Faith as a natural part of life is not an easy thing for a traditional church, as Belcher well knows. The bottom line for Malvern as it struggles with these issues is holding on to its rich heritage while living into a new future.

Embodying our Faith by Tim Morey

One of the unique things of living a Christ-honouring life is that, when done with, integrity it is quite noticeable. This is essentially what Tim Morey writes about in his explanation of living an embodied, Christian life. In particular, life that is every day striving with the help of the Holy Spirit to be a living apologetic for the Kingdom of God. Morey is interested in the Church engaging with postmodern culture in new ways and in being an effective relevant witness.

In a logical manner Morey sets out how he believes the local church can live out a contextual embodied witness. Significantly, this is done by making sure “that those activities we declare normative in our churches serve our embodiment of the gospel.”¹⁶ He goes on to list three keys that the church must embrace totally to fulfil its mission in

¹⁶ Tim Morey, *Embodying our Faith: Becoming a Living, Sharing, Practicing Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 14.

context. First is experiential—that is the relational component between believers and Christ. This aspect is more than classic modernistic knowledge as it includes a real meeting with the risen Jesus in worship in the context of community. Second, it contains a communal element, the believing community: a Body of Jesus’ followers in togetherness being shaped in the image of Christ. Finally, Morey comments that it is enacted. Enacted means living out the Kingdom of God where the desires of God rule the community. He believes the community should take care of itself but as part of this aspect it must have a strong desire to see God’s reign in all parts of life, especially outside of the Church. Enacted, Morey contends, displays this Christian ethic in the world, it is the Kingdom of God with legs and feet. These things he argues, if done with integrity and heartfelt discipleship, will meet the felt need of a postmodern generation by answering the deep longings of transcendence, community and purpose.¹⁷

Morey brings a sense of whole body ministry to his book and his view of an embodied Church. It is the whole of the community that matters. The priesthood of believers means that all have the privilege to act as priests in the sense of pointing people towards God. Over and over again he comments on how living a missional life is a relational life. It is a process whereby believers live in such a way that others notice and are attracted to Jesus. Although he does not say it in as many words, what he means is “they want what I have.” Ministry to a postmodern generation is all about the relationships between the believer and the non-Christian, and the believer and Jesus. It has been entrusted enough to share the Gospel that can be seen to work and make a difference.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

Malvern Church is challenged by this fully devoted life of the believer. It challenges the comfort nature of its Christianity and its lack of desire to build relationships with non-Christians that lead to sharing faith. As such it goes to the heart of discipleship and the will to be a faith-sharing community. It shines a light on the paucity of the culture that continues to endorse an enclave mentality. However, he provides some significant ways forward for a church that is deciding to alter its traditional state of being. In keeping with what he sees as attractive for a postmodern audience, Morey does not dismiss all traditional aspects of the Church. Rather he claims that some actually provide the mystery and transcendence that Gen X is looking for. Yet, he is strong in developing the theme that the Church must read the culture like a missionary would examine a foreign field. As he rightly says, “We must begin to approach our own culture less like Sunday churchgoers and more like missionaries in a post-Christian world.”¹⁸ This, he contends, alters the understanding of what the Church should and should not do as it lives out the mission of God in its context. Like the early church, today's church needs to live the Gospel in a way that is recognised for what it is, not a relic from a bygone era.¹⁹

Morey is helpful in his strong and oft repeated suggestion that postmodernism is not to be feared. His description of postmodernism in connection with the Gospel is really quite a strong effort. Indeed he embraces the current culture and what's more, like the apostle Paul, tries to find the keys that will open up the door for the Gospel. He explains his position well and gives pertinent insight into the culture of the day. This resonates with the three particular felt needs of postmodernism (transcendence,

¹⁸ Ibid., 61.

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

community and purpose) as it gives the Body of Christ traction as it slowly turns to become more missional in its culture. Indeed it is a firm direction on how to reach this generation with the Gospel.

Evangelism as a Natural Way of Life

Conversion in the New Testament by Richard Peace

Richard Peace asks the question, “What is a biblical view of normative conversion?” He does so as he explores the process of evangelism for the Church. Taking the apostle Paul as one example of a dramatic conversion, and the disciples as a more nurtured conversion, he examines each in detail. He argues both are biblical models of conversion that are clearly seen in the New Testament and lived out on its pages.

Paul’s conversion is dramatic and quite instant. The process, according to Peace, takes three stages: insight, turning and transformation. It is necessary for all three to be present for a real conversion experience to take place. Indeed he writes, “Unless there is transformation, there is no conversion.”²⁰ Essentially this is the process God uses to connect with humanity, both psychologically and spiritually in order to effect a behavioural change.

In close relation to Paul’s experience, the conversion of the twelve disciples takes the three same steps of: insight, turning and transformation. Using a detailed examination of Mark’s Gospel, Peace explains how the disciples’ conversion took place over a much longer time; in fact, over the whole time spent with Jesus, and was not fully realised until

²⁰ Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 93.

after his resurrection. Having discovered identity themes of who Jesus is, they finally make sense of the picture and undergo the same threefold process as Paul, thus living out a full-blown conversion experience.

Having worked through the biblical picture of conversion, Peace makes his poignant thesis. He declares, “How we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”²¹ This is of course a critical realisation for the Church and one that has significant implications for the ongoing nature of evangelism and mission. This is perhaps far bigger an issue than what has been addressed. Many, if not most, would define evangelism in the sense of Paul’s experience; and the last fifty years of outreach at Malvern proves this point. To be fair many have come to faith in this type of ministry. It has been used wonderfully of God. But the problem as Peace so readily points out is a problem of discipleship and depth of commitment.²² Many who make decisions of faith under this type of ministry fall at the first hurdle. If in fact this type of evangelism is seen as normative and exclusive for conversion then effectively it halves evangelistic chances. Malvern Church likely sees this as an apt description of evangelism and on the whole does not see a viable alternative. In fact this is some of the reason for a recoiling attitude whenever evangelism is mentioned. This is a substantial block when it comes to teaching on or encouraging evangelism as part of the Christian life.

²¹ Ibid., 286.

²² Ibid., 288.

Of great benefit for Malvern Church is what Peace describes as process evangelism.²³ This step-by-step gradual process by which people experience, think and decide for Jesus fits well for the Malvern cultural context. Strangely, though, Peace misses any discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process. Nevertheless his arguments are pertinent. Peace comments that the Twelve “had to understand what kind of Messiah he was before their commitment was complete.”²⁴ This is a critical point for Malvern. It speaks of valuing the individual, relationships and integrity in faith sharing, all of which speak volumes in such a postmodern culture. Indeed it fits evangelism into a normal worshipping community, as it becomes a part of life rather than one big event. It releases the membership to live and share naturally, not in a contrived way, but out of day-to-day experiences. It might even be said that it would aid in the development of a culture of evangelism.

The Forgotten Ways by Alan Hirsch

In *The Forgotten Ways*, Hirsch responds to the Western Church that is captivated by a Christendom model. He argues that it has ceased to be relevant to much of the population, and growth, if any, mainly comes from transferring of membership. He asks the question, “Will more of the same do the trick?”²⁵ This captivity, he argues, has stunted and devalued every church’s potential to be the living, breathing organism that

²³ Ibid., 287.

²⁴ Ibid., 299.

²⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Press, 2006), 16.

God designed it to be. However, inside every church there is latent potential he calls Apostolic Genius that, if given the chance, will grow and develop the church.

What the Church desperately needs, argues Hirsch using computer metaphors, is not a software reformat but a hardware change. Citing examples from the early church, and the phenomenal growth of the church in China, Hirsch examines what it looks like for the Western Church to grow with a different set of ground rules or hardware. Developing what he terms mDNA he uncovers six key elements that if held together will unleash this Apostolic Genius. It is this Spirit-inspired genetic coding that releases the impetus for mission. It is this coding that Western Christianity has largely forgotten, or more to the point due to the desire for equilibrium, has suppressed.

Not surprisingly, Hirsch's writing is strongly anti-institutionalism and a promotion to a more simplistic form of church government.²⁶ This is something not altogether easy in a structured denomination, albeit quite attractive. However, his simple diagram of what the church is appears attractive. He explains that it is a covenant community centred on Christ and focusing on three main things: worship, discipleship and mission.²⁷ This it seems is the essence of what the Church is about. Moreover it calls Christians back to the essence of church life and to re-evaluate structures and systems in light of his clarity of conviction.

Much of what Hirsch writes about is the releasing of the body into missional ministry. Indeed this underpins a great proportion of his work. These are the examples that he loves to cite. He is clear that unless the Western Church moves from a model of

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 41.

institutional structure to an organic, living system it will atrophy and die. It is this full participation in the mission of God with the six elements in place of mDNA that release the Apostolic Genus in the life of the Church. In many ways it is a total reshaping of the way the Church functions and perceives itself. While it is difficult to imagine such seismic change in Malvern Church and to move quickly from a traditional to an organic structure there is much to learn and embrace.

Hirsch speaks to the essence of the church's life and as such to the very core of motivation. Malvern Church has not examined this for a very long time, if ever.²⁸ There is great fear in doing this as much of what Malvern Church has taken for granted would be put under the microscope. Issues like clergy dominance, styles of worship, mission motivation, needs-based ministry and the understanding of the Gospel would make for very uncomfortable discussions and outcomes. Yet as is clear, if Malvern is to reach the missing generations it must adapt to the context and change its culture towards a far greater organic system. Change is not a welcome bedfellow. Yet this every member ministry is critical if Malvern is to be more than a museum to the past.

However, maybe the greatest part of Hirsch's writing at this stage in Malvern Church's life is the challenge to create the right culture whereby the right conditions are established and the Body of Christ can function in a way that it is intended to. This uses the tradition of Malvern (clergy led) to augment change towards a fuller congregational involvement and thus producing a more organic, grass roots church system. So there are signs of hope in Malvern for the way Hirsch perceives Church should be and operate.

²⁸ Indeed a church building was normal in England, so I suspect they unreflectively copied that behavior in the new colony.

Conclusion

The issue for Malvern Church is complex in light of the above readings. How does a classic, institutional church, one that is a bastion of faith in the community, live out a missional model? The question being asked is can mission change for this church happen at a cultural, systemic level. The answer is of course yes. To rip apart a healthy church is unwise at best. However a gradual steering towards a missional direction and cultural change is a longer-term process but one that involves a candid examining of core being and core practices and bringing them into line with the ultimate purposes of God for the context in which Malvern Church is embedded. Only time will tell if this adaption will be fast enough.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

The church is a living, breathing organism. Under the right conditions it grows and thrives according to God's intent. The apostle Paul cleverly describes it as the Body, pointing to its living organic nature and growth potential. The Church is made up of people of all sorts, sinners, saints and in-between, all who live under the governance of God. This community of faith is empowered by the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. The Church is not a self-serving entity; rather its life from the Spirit is directed towards furthering the work of Jesus. It is a public display of the Reign of God being worked out in flesh and blood giving witness to the world.

Biblical Insights with Regard to the Church and Its Mission

Throughout the Old Testament God works in and through the nation of Israel, who is frequently unable to live in God's covenant ideal. Following the ministry of Jesus and the ensuing day of Pentecost the New Testament chronicles the birth of a new covenant and growth of the Church. The ideal is one people of God, worshiping Jesus under the influence of the Spirit. As the Church moved out from Jerusalem it expanded

rapidly as people accepted the message of the Gospel and were transformed into disciples. This missionary movement was the key factor in the Church's understanding of its function. While there are many things for the Church to be, the New Testament is unambiguous; the Church has a task to fulfill, a God-ordained mandate to undertake. Jesus was clear in his final discourse to the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18). The Church lives out this command.

There are a number of key resources that inform the life of the Church. Scripture, reason, tradition and experience are recognized as key influences as the people of God work out their corporate faith. While the other three are important and bring considerable influence, Scripture holds the ultimate place. Thus the Church is not left wondering what God desires of it. The great commission and the great commandment make this abundantly clear. It is to participate in God's ongoing saving work in this world as it joins with God's mission. This *Missio Dei* is the reflection of the heart of God. Down through the ages the Church has seen this in various ways and has been shaped by that understanding. Below is one attempt to view the Church from a biblical understanding.

A Community Whose Head is Christ: Colossians 1:15-20

From the earliest days of the Church the fundamental Christian creed was "Jesus is Lord." Jesus as Lord is central to the Church's understanding of itself. First Corinthians 8:6b says, "And one lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." That is to say the New Testament is clear: Jesus is Lord over the Church, over humanity, over the known world and over the whole of creation. As an act of recognition the community regularly gathers to remind themselves of this truth and consciously put

themselves under Jesus' rule. First, before anything, the Church is under the headship of Christ who gives it life, direction and meaning.

Paul, writing to the Colossian Christians, is eager to call them away from anything that would usurp the importance of Jesus. Indeed, this leads Paul to pen some of the most exceptional verses as to the importance of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-20. N.T. Wright says, "The six verses of the letter are generally . . . reckoned among the most important Christological passages in the New Testament."¹ What becomes quickly obvious is that Jesus is not one among many, but the first and preeminent of all. Jesus, culminating God's saving plan through history and having given himself in sacrifice, creates one people, the Church, with the intent to bring all things into a new relationship with himself. As redeemer and life giver, he thus claims complete sovereignty over the Church. Paul's use of the metaphor of the body is apt as it expressed the unique organic mutual interdependence between the Church and Christ. Followers become part of the body when they accept his redeeming work and the many parts are gathered up in his lordship. While the word "head" has been open to debate in recent times it carries the sense of sovereignty and also "source" or "origin." Garland states it well: "Christ is the source of the church's life."² What this declares is without Christ the Church has no reason to be, no reason to exist. For the Church, Jesus as Lord is everything.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 64.

² David E. Garland, *Colossians, Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 91.

Worship as the Cornerstone of the Church: Revelations 19:6-8

When the Church proclaims Christ as Lord its next act is one of worship. Grudem defines worship as, “The activity of glorifying God in his presence with our voices and hearts.”³ Throughout the pages of Scripture God's people have responded in a similar manner. Having first recognized who God is, or in the language of the New Testament, proclaimed that Jesus is Lord, the heartfelt response is always worship. Isaiah demonstrates this albeit from the Old Testament. In Isaiah 6, the prophet has a vision of God seated on his throne attended by the Seraphs. The Seraphs worshiped, as they understood clearly the substantive nature of God. Isaiah is also under no illusions as his response is one of woe but then proclaiming the majesty of the One he was standing before. Worship is the right response for the people of God when they gather together in the presence of the Lord. Its purposes, as Clowney phrases it, “Brings to expression the very being of the church.”⁴

Revelation 19 paints a picture at the end of time, when the Church is seen for what it is. The apostle John proclaims the Church as the fully-prepared bride on the day of her wedding. The cry of the multitude in verse 6 is: “Hallelujah,” not because Babylon has been overthrown but because, “the Lord our God the Almighty reigns;” it is future oriented.⁵ Here the Church is in true worship, at the consummation of all things recognizing God for his marvelous acts on their behalf. The name of God here “Almighty” or Greek *Pantokrator* means “controller of all things” and is used

³ Wayne Grudem, *Making Sense of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1003.

⁴ Clowney as quoted in Grudem, *Making Sense of the Church*, 1004.

⁵ Leon L. Morris, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 226.

particularly in the book of Revelation.⁶ The church worships Father, Son and Spirit as the end of time reveals God to be true to this name, the controller of all things. The passage continues to shed light on how pivotal this is for the Church to be at worship. Worship is the only right response for those peoples who have received salvation, redemption and eternal life. Indeed the end of the small snapshot of the Church comes with John attempting to worship the angel and receiving a reprimand: “Worship God,” is the direct order from this celestial being (Rev 19:10) pointing always toward God.

Discipleship as the Transformation of the Church: Colossians 1:9-14

Discipleship, the process of being transformed into the image of Christ, is applicable both to the Christian individual and whole community. For many, discipleship comes out of a worship experience. Discipleship often takes place when Christians see how Holy God is, get a sense of their own sinfulness and open up to the work of the Spirit. Discipleship moves to change thinking, behavior and character, bringing them in line with the ideal God has for the believer. The Spirit moves in the follower to develop the spiritual gifts and usher the Christian into maturity for service and ministry. Returning to Isaiah 6 is helpful for grasping the flow of worship to discipleship. Isaiah has seen the Lord. He knows that he is not holy in God's presence. In verse five Isaiah says, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.” Even the sage prophet cannot stand before God and it takes the angel to touch him with the coal for his guilt to be taken away. He moves from sinner to disciple as his life is freed in order to serve.

⁶ William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John, Vol. 1* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1976), 173.

In his letter to the Colossian Christians, Paul makes it clear what discipleship looks like (Col 1:9-14). Even though this section is in the context of a prayer, the practicalities of discipleship are clearly on display for the church to move into. Garland comments that Paul pens this passage for the Colossians so that, “Understanding God’s will involves recognizing how Christ is the fulfillment of Gods redemptive purposes,”⁷ indicating that discipleship again comes out of a worship response. As a consequence, Paul cites growth in knowledge, holiness, spiritual power and thankfulness as key components of a developing discipleship life. The reason for this is given in verse 10: “So that you may lead lives worth of the Lord, fully pleasing . . . bear[ing] fruit.” The words used here might be summed up in one: growing. That is the individual and the Church are to continue in their development of maturity as more of Christ is experienced and understood. This indicates an ongoing task of moving deeper into relationship with Jesus and disengaging with aspects of current culture because of the primary creed of the Church: Jesus is Lord.

Mission as the Spilling Out of the Church: Ephesians 3:2-13

Mission is a joining in with the work of God in the world. The Church has been graciously invited to be a part of the privilege to explain, reveal and live the way of Jesus. It is the announcement of the Gospel that down through time God has been working redemption in human history and this all culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul, in Ephesians 3:2-13 insightfully calls this a “mystery,” three times in fact, but in verse 6 declares its purpose: that the “Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of

⁷ Garland, *Colossians, Philemon*, 65.

the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.” It was to this task that he had become a servant, but a task that also belongs to the Church. Verse 10 makes this abundantly clear: “So that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known.” As Bruce states, “The church thus appears to be God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God's will.”⁸ Paul had grasped the scope of God’s work in the world and the unique role the Church plays in mission.

Isaiah 6 culminates in mission. God asks the question in verse 8, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah's answer is “Here am I; send me!” Isaiah clearly grasps the holy nature of God, his supreme Lordship, his own change of heart and this leads him in service for God’s requirements in the world. The Church has been playing catch up since Pentecost. For many years mission was not high on the Church’s priorities, relegated to minorities and fringe elements. However, as Newbigin so clearly states, “A church which is not ‘the church in mission’ is no church at all.”⁹ It is clear that God’s design for the Church is to be outward-focused and Spirit-led in whole-world engagement. Confessing the Lordship of Christ, worshiping the Glory of God, and being changed into the image of Jesus all lead to the place of mission. As Newbigin so eloquently writes, “There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world.”¹⁰

⁸ FF Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 321.

⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

Uniting Church Particulars: An Australian Church Story

The Uniting Church in Australia is a unique blend of historic, Western Church ecclesiology. Being the third largest of Australia's denominations it draws from the reformed and evangelical traditions.¹¹ Its life is to be governed by the witness of the Reformation and by listening to the teaching of John Wesley.¹² The Uniting Church binds itself closely with the classic creeds of the Christian faith and aligns itself with an orthodox faith, sitting squarely in the Christian tradition. As such it resides within the “confessing church” stream of churches. Its founding document, “The Basis of Union” makes this clear: “The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”¹³ In fact the Uniting Church constantly seeks to be united with other denominations hence the name Uniting and not United. Ecumenism is important.¹⁴ The Uniting Church identifies itself with the classic marks of the Church.¹⁵ It strives to always be open to reform although the actualities of this are complex and problematic. As such it has a strong eschatological focus. Indeed the overall image of the Uniting Church could be one of a journey. Echoing Newbigin,¹⁶ paragraph three of the “Basis of Union” states, “The Church is a pilgrim people, always

¹¹ Christopher Walker, ed., *Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia: Building on the Basics* (Sydney: The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2012), 6.

¹² The Uniting Church in Australia, “Basis of Union, Paragraph 10,” The Uniting Church in Australia, <http://www.uca.org.au/basisofunion.htm> (accessed September 23, 2014).

¹³ *Ibid.*, Paragraph 2.

¹⁴ Walker, *Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁶ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 152.

on the way towards a promised goal.”¹⁷ This has been seen in such things as the institution of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the development of multi-nationality congregations. But in particular it is always in review in order to journey towards Gods future.

Up until quite recently the Uniting Church has not been good at producing substantial resources in ecclesiology. Only in recent times have papers begun to be circulated and be commented on. These have come about more from aberrations to the spirit of the Church than as to right practice.

The way the Uniting Church organizes itself gives witness to its divergent background and union. The local community of faith is seen as the “primary unit of the church.”¹⁸ Much power is invested in the church council, the governing body of the local expression. This church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a true church when by Word and Sacrament it proclaims Jesus as Lord. This is how, “God addresses us, serves us and calls us to be God's people.”¹⁹ Ordained ministers are charged to oversee the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments in conjunction with the council. While ordination is seen as a significant part of the life of the local church, increasingly congregations are struggling to afford the associated costs. Pragmatics thus has a hand in the changing nature of the office of ordination and the way ministry is viewed at a local level.

¹⁷ The Uniting Church in Australia, “Basis of Union, Paragraph 3.”

¹⁸ Walker, *Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia*, 115.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Alongside the local church council are the presbytery, synod and assembly. Typically these would mean presbytery as an area, synod as a state and assembly as the national body. These councils in ever-widening circles give leadership and governance in various areas. Taken together it is meant to be one of mutual submission and unity for the sake of the Gospel.²⁰ Without bishops these councils use the consensus decision-making model as a way to discern the movement of the Spirit and in the search for unity. In a sense the council, particularly the presbytery, is the bishop. Clergy and laity differences are nullified in much of the way the Uniting Church practices its polity. Indeed many lay leaders govern the church at all levels.

One of the distinctives of the Uniting Church is a theology that says through its worshipping life the Church is equipped to serve the world. Indeed one document states, “The church does not exist for itself and its members but to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus, to be a sign and an agent of the reign of God.”²¹ Mission is important and it was important at union.²² Some would say that it was the only consistent reason given for the forming of the denomination.²³ Another theologian comments that the “Basis of Union” is “the charter under which we agree to go on mission together.”²⁴ Mission has been high on the agenda ever since. Mission though for the Uniting Church

²⁰ Ibid., 117.

²¹ Ibid., 115.

²² This could have been the influence of Newbigin as the Uniting Church took some of its polity and theology from the Church of South India.

²³ Andrew Dutney, *Where Did the Joy Come From? Revisiting the Basis of Union* (Sydney: The Uniting Church, 2001), 17.

²⁴ Walker, *Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia*, 85.

means many things. Ranging from evangelism in some context to social justice in others, some actual places have been dubbed “the mission” as they do work with homeless and underprivileged. According to Dutney, mission also includes reconciliation, both as agents for the Kingdom of God and for first and second peoples of Australia, community building, advocacy and a readiness to suffer.²⁵ Across the nation the Uniting Church runs schools and agencies, aged care facilities, welfare assistance programs, Outback Services, clinics and financial services. As such, mission covers the widest possible meaning and represents a holistic approach.

Strengths: A Theology of Unity and Incarnation - One Church in Every Town

The Uniting Church has many strengths as it lives out what it believes to be the embodiment of the Gospel in Australia. Unity is critically important for the Uniting Church. As already indicated, “uniting” is the verb that underlies the church’s intent. Originally this was intended to be an outward expression, but more recently with such debates as those over sexuality it has increasingly been used for togetherness. Unity in the Uniting Church sense is not meant to be a pro-forma for conformity. There is great diversity within the life of the Church itself. However it acknowledges, “Our common baptism unites us to Christ and to one another as a pilgrim people on the way to God’s promised goal.”²⁶ In a sense the Uniting Church echoes much of the theology of Newbigin in this area. His belief is that when the Church stops to strive for unity it

²⁵ Dutney, *Where Did the Joy Come From?*, 22.

²⁶ Walker, *Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia*, 141.

“contradicts its own nature.”²⁷ Indeed in his opinion, physical unity is the goal for the Church.²⁸ Dutney believes that unity is essential to the Uniting Church for in fact the Uniting Church claims to already be in fellowship with other churches, full unity is the goal.²⁹ To that end there is a sense of connectedness and working together for the common cause.

A drive through many country towns quickly turns up a Uniting Church building, easily recognizable by the logo. Many of these are historic buildings that have stood for a long time. More often than not these were Methodist buildings commonly constructed of stone and seating about eighty people. It belies though a deeper theology. It was a living out of the mission that drove communities to establish a place of worship in each town. They sought to be a living, breathing witness to Jesus and live out the Gospel mandate in their location. Today many remain in use as a beacon for communities that the Church is here.

While there are not that many new buildings constructed today, the general culture of what the early divergent parts of the Uniting Church strove for is still in play. The Uniting Church has a culture of incarnation. It strives to live out the mission of Jesus in local expressions through the power of the Spirit. This is done in many ways from Frontier Services who look after the people of the outback to volunteerism in service organizations. Indeed, a local church minister who was faced with losing the use of the Meals on Wheels kitchen for their local Cornish Pasty fundraiser suggested to the

²⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 153.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Dutney, *Where Did the Joy Come From?*, 23.

management board to add up the number of Uniting Church volunteers they had. Access was quickly granted.³⁰ The “Basis of Union” states that the Church is “an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.”³¹ The Uniting Church strives to be an effective witness in all aspects of Australian life.

Weaknesses: The Changing Nature of a Denomination

Just as the church possesses strengths so this Australian Church has many growth areas. One area of great pressure is the balance between social justice and discipleship. While not a lot of Uniting Church documents have been written on this, the tension is clear from the expressions of local churches. One side of the argument believes that some have gone too far in acquiescing towards cultural values while the other side argues that not enough compassion is being shown. Newbigin sums up the dichotomy perfectly:

Christian programs for justice and compassion are severed from their proper roots in the liturgical and sacramental life of the congregation, and so lose their character as signs of the presence of Christ and risk becoming mere crusades fueled by a moralism which can become self-righteous. And the life of the worshiping congregation, severed from its proper expression in compassionate service to the secular community around it, risks becoming a self-centered existence serving only the needs and desires of its members.³²

His arguments are pertinent to today's church, in particular to what is viewed as an assembly agenda. Much is made of social justice issues with these being touted as discipleship, yet failing in spiritual transformation. A case in point is the current twitter feed of Andrew Dutney, the President of the Uniting Church National Assembly, who has

³⁰ Ashleigh Davis, personal email, used with permission.

³¹ The Uniting Church in Australia, “Basis of Union, Paragraph 3.”

³² Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 11.

over the latter part of 2013 and early-2014 dominated his feed with asylum seeker issues. This typifies the divide and points to the emphasis of social justice over discipleship. It is clear that the Church has much to say to the community. However, it is clear that Scriptures have much to say to the Church in the way that disciples are to be transformed as “a people on the way.”

The place of mystery in the Uniting Church is also in tension with intellectualism. Mystery in this sense means those things that are unfathomable to reason. In many ways the Uniting Church operates out of a Modernist mindset, largely due to its age profile, but also because of the scholars it listens to. Reason plays a formidable part in the church's life. While the church acknowledges the place of mystery and indeed celebrates its presence, it dissipates its present effectiveness. In such things as “Christians meet God in the sacraments,” the liturgy tells there is little if any faith that this same God would affect real change in their lives. This focus brings a weakness that is a disconnection of the church to a postmodern culture.

In the same manner chaplaincy has taken the place of proclamation. Just as Malvern Church struggles with this issue, it is a church-wide problem. The Uniting Church is coy about raising the alarm over such things as morality and sin, with preference given to commenting on social issues outside of the church's direct influence. Words like “journey” have come to mean, “walk along side of,” but never “stop you are going the wrong way.” This is especially true for the topic of evangelism. Many in the church would see this akin to proselytism and that is a sin to be avoided at all costs.

Much of the church's work for the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God is linked to social systems rather than personal change.

Evangelism is then under fire. Some would like the word to be dropped altogether and replaced with interfaith dialogue. Others are simply confused while a minority continues in the same vein of evangelism that has been operating for two-hundred years. On the whole any mention of evangelism brings suspicion and bias. Tolerance and respect is the tone of the era and evangelism cuts across that with conjured up images of Bible-thumping preachers, judgment and hell fire. The confusion though is more damaging. Faithful people who would and could share their faith are perplexed by the debate and leadership simply refrains from sharing. Apart from a very small element the body loses its ability to reproduce and create new life, remaining impotent and barren.

Contextual Evangelism as an Expression of Mission

It is imperative that the Australian Church wrestles with the difficult issues of evangelism. Mission in a Uniting Church context is broad and wide. While this is holistic in thought the actual practice overlooks the need for personal evangelism. With such a nationwide presence the Uniting Church is in a unique place to bear this witness, if it can share legitimate faith. This is the key. Failure to do so will result in a massive shrinking of the church into a small subset on the Christian landscape.

The church seems to be satisfied with its practice of worship. Indeed, Malvern Church, typical of many Uniting churches, works hard at a worship experience that places God at the centre. It has a value of excellence in worship and does not take the Thursday and Sunday gatherings lightly. To a lesser extent discipleship receives a fair

treatment. Home groups, personal mentoring and Christian education opportunities exist to foster discipleship. Malvern like other Uniting churches has a good habit of Christian education. These things promote and augment towards a developing discipleship. And while it is true that Malvern is making attempts at corporate evangelistic efforts, actual personal faith sharing is low. Understandably this is critical for the ongoing life of the church.

The present time requires the church to focus its attention around personal evangelism. Its structures must be given permission towards this end. It has to create space in its life to train and equip its members to share. However, if this evangelism is to be effective, it must take place with sensitivity towards the context. One colleague quipped, “American trains don’t run on Australian tracks,” to that it could be added “one suburb’s train won’t run on another’s tracks.” Faith has to make sense in the place it’s located. The thought of sharing faith like this strikes fear into the heart of many. Surprisingly, this is a good thing. Often evangelism is seen as something other than what it could be at a local level. Further, transferred images hinder its expression. Working out how evangelism looks in Malvern’s context is a hard thing to do, maybe the hardest, but it is the necessary work of an embodied faith.

A Flexible Methodology for a Mission Context

The *prima facie* need is for the church to recognize that Australia is in a mission context and that it needs a flexible strategy to communicate the Gospel. A personal experience drove home to me the reality of the circumstance. I was in London in 1994 and happened to meet up with a German Christian who exclaimed, “I love meeting

Australians as I want to be a missionary to Australia.” Recovering from the shock I realised the full extent of the situation. It was a seismic moment and paradigm shift in my understanding of Australia's missionary context. Indeed, Australian Christians have to make that change and see that the era of the church as bastion of faith has gone. The era of church on the outer has come.

The shift in perception for the church leads to a new thinking in what it is as church and, then, how to live out that faith. Church as missionary changes the focus of life together. No longer can the church expect to be given a voice and consulted, even on issues of spirituality. Today's missionary context requires a new way of doing evangelism. This includes the need to “make excuses” to connect with the wider community and find ways to legitimately share the Gospel. This is also true for neighbours, friends and acquaintances as they make up much of the substance of personal evangelism. It also means learning the keys to open the cultural doors for the Gospel. The lines of church as institution need to be blurred as it moves towards church as institution with a missionary heart.

Evangelism from a Non-institutional Structure: Lessons to Learn

The problem with a long history is a tangled web of engrained tradition. This is especially true for a denomination that still hears the stories of the Wesleyan revival and heydays of the 1960s. Evangelism is too easily thought of as an event. Into this mix Michael Frost presents a provocative viewpoint from a non-institutional standpoint.

Michael Frost: Ecclesiology from Beyond the Institutional Church

There is no doubt that Frost provides a compelling vision of the missional church. He paints a picture of disciples who are engaged in their community in such a way as to be a foretaste of the reign of God. In fact he uses the imagery that a missional church is like a movie preview and in the same way people remark that they would like to see the film; they say, "I want to see the world they come from."³³ He rightly sees the Gospel as good news of God's activity through Jesus, an activity that is applicable for all creation.³⁴ To this end he sees every aspect of life and creation in need of the Gospel and indeed the church's mandate to bring it. While pointing towards eschatological themes his ecclesiology is mostly grounded in life here and now.

Underpinning much of what Frost espouses is the theme of living out the Christian life. Calling the church to account for a shallow version of faith he argues strongly that the church must orient its ecclesiology around mission.³⁵ Not mission as just a part of the whole, but mission as the driving factor in everything the church does. Business as usual is not an option. The church must take seriously its missional calling and live it out particularly in the poorer places of the world. Mission is more than a program or seasonal activity. Mission is the entwining of social involvement and evangelism, all in alerting people to the reign of God.³⁶ In this sense he is close to

³³ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Newbigin. However, Frost shows no love for the institutional church, nor it seems anything traditional. For Frost, organic seems to be the salient word.

When it comes to evangelism, even this holy grail of evangelicalism comes under Frost's scrutiny and does not escape his criticism. He does not see how the evangelical church has individualized the message of the Gospel, nor why it focuses on “going to heaven when you die.”³⁷ Evangelism is more than growing church membership he is quick to point out. He rightly makes the claim that evangelism is not mission but rather one part of the whole. With this in mind he sketches out a more holistic approach to evangelism. This he dubs "inhabited truth" by which he means the announcement of the reign of God in both word and deed. He says, “The communicator's whole life inhabits the message being conveyed.”³⁸ It might be said that he argues for integrity in the evangelism process, one where the community of God lives out the reign of God and in doing so engenders trust and friendship over time. In many ways he downplays belief over action and to some extent proclamation gives way to presence.

Frost's ecclesiology has a number of blind spots. In calling for a community of believers to embed themselves in a local area and meet the needs inherent there, he seems to overlook the suburban church. Indeed he seems at pains to downplay its influence or legitimacy. While there are many things to learn from his missional ecclesiology his narrowness of vision for a missional church obscures his vision of the potential for the traditional church. One of the big factors going for a traditional, suburban church is that it is already embedded in the community; it just needs to be shown how to engage. Further,

³⁷ Ibid., 42.

³⁸ Ibid., 55.

in his eagerness to enact mission, Frost seems to overlook the God-given mandate to make disciples, or the fact that the early church “added to their number each day” (Acts 2:47) in that he has little time for a numerically growing church.³⁹

Evangelism as a Way of Life: Relational and Personal Story

Evangelism as a way of life for Frost is the way it is meant to be. He pictures the community of God as incarnational that lives and breathes the same issues. Light on his own experience Frost draws from a wide range of stories around the globe to show how this can be enacted. The crucial point that Frost makes is that when lived in a humble attitude of the cross, something he describes as cruciform spirituality, “we are necessarily drawn outward, toward ‘sinners,’ not away from them.”⁴⁰ This he discerns is part of the bringing of Shalom, the peace and righteousness of Jesus to all manner of situations. Relationships on a personal level are critically important for the life of the church as it engages with the community. Hospitality and meal sharing is another big factor. When the quality of the community and the depth of relationships are seen by unbelievers, then Frost argues the way is open for a discussion of the reign of God and devotion to Christ.

His great challenge to the traditional church and its ecclesiology is the turning of agendas. Frost represents a view that points outward, toward others, toward the pain and suffering and poor in the world. For the institutional church, one like Malvern where comfort is a cultural value and where the norm of the community is living behind security and gates, Frost's ideas are difficult and challenging, but certainly not impossible.

³⁹ In a pejorative sense he links church attendance with consumerism, *Ibid.*, 69ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

Gaining a Clear Picture of Culture and Church

Church in Australian society is on the margins. With 8 percent of the population claiming some Christian worship attendance the church is a minority.⁴¹ Indeed 54 percent of all Australians indicate that they are not involved in any religious practices at all.⁴² Of those who stated some religious identification 24 percent indicated they are not active in practicing religious activities.⁴³ Further, 34 percent of those who identified with the Christian faith as Protestant or Evangelical do not regularly attend worship.⁴⁴

Loneliness: The Trend of Broken Marriages and Separated Living

The Census data gives a clear picture of the evolving nature of society in the suburb of Malvern. In 2001⁴⁵ 6.4 percent of residents were either divorced or separated, however by 2011⁴⁶ the number had risen dramatically to 9.1 percent. Indeed data relays that households are shrinking in numbers and for a range of factors more people are living alone, and one-parent families have increased by 1.2 percent over ten years.⁴⁷ Isolation is increasing. This data hints at a variety of underlying causes. The impact of social media is one such cause. Indeed it represents a paradox of friendship for typically

⁴¹ Australian Communities Report, 6.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. "2001 Census Quick Stats: Malvern," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2001/quickstat/SSC41956?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed October 29, 2013).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the more online friends equates to less face-to-face friends. Instant messages, chat rooms, forums, snap chat, Facebook and to a lesser extent email, is fostering loneliness. Simply said, with all these social networking sites and the ease of communication, society is becoming even more isolated.⁴⁸ While a lack of time is often cited as the fault of relationship building⁴⁹ the recent YouTube clip criticizing Facebook “What’s on your mind?” (and social media in general) is a case in point.⁵⁰ People know more, can talk more, in a wider variety of ways but sadly relate in ways that matter less.

While the media plays a significant part, lack of trust and fear is to a large extent driving the seclusion.⁵¹ World events no longer take days to be reported, they happen in real time as if they were unfolding next door. Personal conversations indicate that many people believe more than ever that the world is an unsafe place and are frightened to leave the security of their environment. This is especially true for the elderly and those who are alone. Further, those who are already frightened could view this trend as a sign that the world is increasingly unsafe.⁵² Loneliness is perpetuated and anything new or different is shunned.

⁴⁸ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 108.

⁴⁹ Philip Hughes, “Insecurity in Australia,” NCL.org, <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=4145> (accessed January 7, 2014).

⁵⁰ The Higton Brothers, “What’s On Your Mind,” Youtube.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxVZYiJK11Y> (accessed August 21, 2014).

⁵¹ Hughes, “Insecurity in Australia.”

⁵² Ibid.

Losing My Religion

The point of declining religious interest has been made well enough in previous chapters. Australians are decreasing in their involvement with the Church and in particular with anything to do with organized religion.⁵³ Younger generations, especially those described as Gen Y, are more likely to have a reduced faith involvement. Gen Y is also shown to be more opposed to Christianity than other generations.⁵⁴

Notably research shows that a big turn off for Australians was the public endorsement of Christianity by celebrities.⁵⁵ “We are not Americans,” it says clearly. The Australian Communities Report lists ten “belief blockers” that on the whole are a stumbling block for people engaging with organized religion. Some listed include: Church abuse, hypocrisy, suffering, hell and condemnation, and homosexuality.⁵⁶

The survey found that while there was a reasonably high biblical knowledge it points out that many failed to understand key concepts of the faith, like grace and salvation.⁵⁷ Moreover, issues over belief surface regularly with many Australians suspicious of swallowing a doctrinal creed, choosing rather to believe on the grounds of rationality and those that seem plausible.⁵⁸ The survey pointed towards the increasing

⁵³ Australian Communities Report, 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

nature of individualized faith and the movement of many from the dislike of religion to openness towards spirituality.⁵⁹

Evangelism a Wakeup Call for the Church

Since inception the Church has always been one generation away from extinction. Faith sharing is possibly the most pressing area for the Uniting Church as it faces rapidly declining membership. While on the whole the Uniting Church is not good at evangelism, it needs to be. Frost is right in that it is only a part of mission, yet for a church that does very little in this area it is a value that needs to be promoted and resourced. The paucity of effort towards evangelism is a real threat for the Uniting Church in general and Malvern in particular. Issues of social justice, while important are not vital. Breaking into the culture of Australia with the Gospel is difficult, risky and hard but for the survival of the church, it must be attempted in the power of the Spirit.

The good news is that while over half of the Australian population was content with their religious outlook, 41 percent were open to change.⁶⁰ While this spiritual change ranged from “slightly open” to “extremely open,” it does indicate a sense of hope for the church.⁶¹ Moreover there is substantive indication that Australians are open to a credible live witness, which is a person who lives the way of the Gospel. This is shown to be far more attractive than anything when it comes to faith sharing. In short, there is opportunity but one that needs to have integrity and contain significant relational aspects.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Every Member's Task: Evangelism as the Result of Worship and Discipleship

The results of postmodernism have changed the cultural landscape for the Church. Old doors have shut and new ones are opening. The winds of the Spirit are blowing for the Church to discern and act. As suspicion for the Church builds and past abuse continues to mar the church's name, one-on-one relationships hold the key for evangelism. It boils down to every member who has been transformed by worship and changed by discipleship to reach out into the world with the good news that Jesus offers grace and meaning. Key to the Australian Church reaching out with the Gospel is a significant finding from the Australian Communities Report that says, "Seeing others (sic) Christians living out a genuine faith was found to be an attraction for Australians to investigate religion and spirituality (54%). Over 1 in 10 Australians (11%) expressed that this would strongly attract them to explore religion and spirituality."⁶² This work is the work of the Church, every member acting, living, speaking and showing the way of Christ. Frost is right in that a generation who has been given everything really only wants authenticity.⁶³ Some may ask, "Is there any hope for the institutional church?" Like Bill Hybels says, "The local church is the hope of the world."⁶⁴ That said, yes, there is hope.

⁶² Ibid., 13.

⁶³ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Publishers, 2006), 93.

⁶⁴ Bill Hybels, "The Local Church is the Hope of the World," (lecture, Willow Creek Summit, 2005).

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY OF CONTEXTUALISED EVANGELISM

Evangelism is a heavily disputed word in contemporary church circles. In the history of the church, evangelism has waxed and waned as the need arises.¹ Finney, quoting William Abraham, gives a helpful working definition of the subject at hand: “That set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God.”² It is the task of the Church to share the grace of God to those who have not heard and who have not experienced it. Evangelism is faith sharing in word and action so that others might see the reality of God, pledge their allegiance to Jesus and go forward in life under the influence of the Spirit. Whilst various times in history have seen different emphases and energy employed the basic theme remains; evangelism is sharing the Good News that God has broken into this world and invites all to join his Kingdom.

¹ For instance, in certain historical periods everyone who lived in certain lands were considered “Christian.”

² John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), 7.

For the modern era the most significant impact on evangelistic thinking has come from the revival crusade.³ Evangelism for more than the last hundred years has, on the whole been dominated by this one model. Images of big tents, huge crowds and charismatic personalities by and large overshadow any conversation or creativity regarding evangelism. Evangelism came to be a one-off event that called for a decision.

This has the effect of forming a tunnel vision for the Church and shutting out any innovative thinking. By-and-large a generation believed that there was really only one way to effectively share faith. The revival-type evangelism however should not be understated or maligned. The crusade-type of evangelism has been significant in many people's lives and has been used by the Spirit to awaken many to faith.

However its pejorative impact on the local church and local believers today must be realised. There is an element of frustration when the topic of evangelism comes up. That is, the Church knows it should share faith, as it knows this is how the Church grows. But how possibly can this be done by a local church in a revival-style form is the question. Further, the frustration is heightened by what appears to be a pointed truth, that only a certain and very few people can be evangelists. Individual members who have heard from the pulpit time-and-time again that they need to share faith are left bewildered with the thought of how they are to emulate the Billy Grahams of the world.

Many preachers are good at the “should” of evangelism but not the “how.” There is no doubt that the influence of Modernism with its emphasis on experts has contributed

³ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 194.

to the Church's understanding of evangelism.⁴ There is recognition of just how much more is required than this particular type of evangelism if new believers were to come into the fullness of God's grace. Evangelism has to be more than a one-off event by selected individuals. Speaking about this Finney comments that, "Something deeper and more extensive was required."⁵

The message of evangelism and the understanding of conversion have differed over time as people come to grips with the fullness of the Gospel. Scot McKnight is one example of those leading the charge in recovering evangelism and the Gospel from a purely salvation by faith understanding to a much broader holistic message.⁶ In agreement with Dallas Willard he comments that the Gospel is more than "sin management."⁷ This is a response to many who held a narrow view of God's intended work in the world, but a view that limits the boundaries to faith sharing. Moreover, Richard Peace adds: "I have come to believe that how we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism."⁸ He is right, evangelism for too long has been held captive to a restrictive and well-defined metric. There is more to faith sharing.

⁴ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 25ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸ Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 286.

Contextual Evangelism a Careful Approach to Faith Sharing

Contextual evangelism broadens the traditional map when it comes to the landscape of faith sharing. Out of many, it is one possible way forward in an Australian context. While not rejecting past efforts, it attempts to recast evangelism for a new day and a postmodern culture. The Church, like never before, is on the margins of society. This brings with it issues of distrust and a heightened suspicion of the institution. As it has been so often pointed out, the model of Christendom is no longer in operation.⁹ The old assumed factors have atrophied and past methodology of faith sharing is no longer effective, nor relevant.

While it might be a new term, contextual evangelism points directly towards its purpose and situation. It is simply evangelism embedded in a local context that has concern for the location and the listeners. It is interested in how the message is conveyed and heard, and what barriers exist to a meaningful sharing of faith. Contextual evangelism takes seriously the place it resides in. It realises that for the Gospel to be understood it must come in a form that resonates with the listeners. It seeks to discern the deep longings that exist in the culture of meaning, purpose and significance.

For a number of reasons it is the opposite of mass evangelism. One illustration from some faith sharing research proves the point. Finney, over a number of occasions mentions his discovery, and indeed surprise, that many of those who have found faith in the UK have not responded to Jesus because of sin or guilt.¹⁰ Sin and guilt he contends are the age-old bait that many believe to be the reason individuals come to faith. In

⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 51.

¹⁰ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 97.

particular he cites the younger generation, influenced by postmodernism that have very little understanding of personal sin and hold uncertainty over truth.¹¹ In short, it makes little if any cultural sense to the hearers. Contextual evangelism begins faith sharing at a level of understanding for the listeners, not the propositional truth agenda of the speaker. It searches for key points of contact and often takes the form of a dialogue. For instance, story is important for the inhabitants of postmodernism. As Dickson points out the Gospel “is news of events;” it is not a static presentation.¹²

Contextual evangelism challenges the presuppositions of the institutional church. Evangelism has to be carefully thought through in each and every context. It is not enough to take for granted that which worked in another place and by another church will automatically work elsewhere. Finney reflecting on this comments perceptively, “The question many modern Christians need to face is, ‘Have we assumed that the good news which is rightly given to Antioch is also appropriate for Athens?’ Have we taken it for granted that a gospel whose content was suitable for the church is also satisfactory when the message is taken out of the church?”¹³ Indeed it forces the Church outside its own walls and on to the street in order for it to engage at a culturally appropriate level. The institutional church does not like to leave the safety of the building, preferring to say “come” instead of obeying Jesus’ “go.” Contextual evangelism flips the needs of the Church on its head as it does whatever is necessary to share faith and engage the culture.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission: Promoting the Gospel with More Than our Lips* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 121.

¹³ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 98.

Sadly, this points to the inadequacy of many evangelistic attempts that do not do the necessary groundwork of contextual adaptation, thinking or risk.

Asking the Right Questions - Jesus: John 4:4-26

Jesus was the master of contextual evangelism. Indeed the incarnation is the ultimate expression of contextual faith sharing. God comes to humanity in a way they can understand wrapped in human flesh. The incident in John 4 brings into sharp relief what one example of this looks like. Jesus leaves the boundaries of Judaism for the cultural scandal of Samaria, a nation considered enemies for Jews. While resting at a well Jesus initiates a dialogue with a Samaritan woman. Even though this episode violates several cultural norms it opens up the possibility of a transforming conversation.

Striking up the discussion Jesus begins at a place of mutual interest—water. He uses the need of thirst to open a conversation about the woman’s life. With a play on the phrase in verse 10 “living water,” Jesus hints at multiple needs for the woman, but she only recognises one. Somewhat disengaged to Jesus’ significance the woman focuses on the literal meaning. Leon Morris comments that up to this point her “concern is with her own personal convenience,”¹⁴ which interestingly sounds remarkably postmodern.

Verses 16-19, however, change the encounter as they open up the conversation into the woman’s own life. Calling her marital status in question Jesus proves his ability to provide living water. He is more than just another man and the woman quickly recognizes his prophetic status. This contextual evangelism leads the woman towards her personal inadequacies and Jesus’ provision. The conversation continues to unfold and for

¹⁴ Leon L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 233.

whatever reason¹⁵ the location of worship is introduced. Essentially, Jesus contends that, “Genuine worship is spiritual. It is not dependent on places and things.”¹⁶ In other words, he is the one to be worshiped, for he is the Messiah (verse 26). Having been led to this point the woman recognises Jesus for what he is and quickly runs to share the good news. Ultimately the whole town hears the good news of the Messiah and make the amazing claim that, “We know that this is truly the Saviour of the world” (verse 42b).

Jesus, in this case of contextual evangelism, moves the woman from a cursory conversation about water to an understanding of who he is. Then with great insight, Jesus asks the right questions and the woman has a reality check of her own life. Ultimately, Jesus reveals his Messianic status. The woman believing Jesus’ claim, having moved from disinterest and unbelief to conversion, and then witnessing to the town, resulted in many coming to believe in Jesus. This is contextual faith sharing at its best. In speaking about Jesus and his approach Finney comments, “He speaks *ad hominem* - adjusting his words to the needs of his hearers,”¹⁷ exactly what is found in this example. Even to outsiders, for the Gospel comes not only to Israel, but to those whom they scorn and marginalize.¹⁸ Jesus fitted his words perfectly to the context.

¹⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 236. Morris suggests it was avoidance of her sin. Maybe though she wanted to know what the prophet thinks about the dispute over worship.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 98.

¹⁸ Gail O’Day and Susan E. Hylen, *John (Westminster Bible Companion)* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2006), 565.

Open to the Spirit: Peter: Acts 10: 23-48

The Holy Spirit is the key participant in what Robert Wall terms as a “Gentile Pentecost.”¹⁹ The Spirit had already prepared Peter for what was to come. The vision of the sheet being lowered and the supernatural insight into the three visitors was all in readiness for the new Gentile ministry. The Spirit too had been active in Cornelius’s life and led him to send messengers for Peter. The Holy Spirit sends a prayerful Peter to a Gentile that has been prepared.

However the Spirit’s involvement in this pericope goes beyond the simple. Several literary phrases enable understanding the Spirit’s work. First, in verse 34, when Peter addresses the Gentile audience he uses a particular turn of phrase: “Then Peter began to speak to them,” or literally, “Peter then opened his mouth.”²⁰ Wall believes this is an indication that his words are inspired prophecy.²¹ In the list of the gifts of the Spirit from 1 Corinthians 12, it leaves no doubt that the Spirit is indeed behind the prophetic. Further, when Peter explains in verse 43b, “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name,” there is the echo of Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:21, a passage directly referring to the Spirit’s work in the world. Thus it can be concluded that in the obvious and in the sublime the Spirit is enabling this evangelism of the Gentiles.

Nevertheless, the Spirit’s involvement in this narrative requires the active participation of all involved. Both Peter and Cornelius were open to the activity of the Spirit. What is found here is that the Spirit is vital in contextual evangelism. Indeed

¹⁹ Robert W. Wall, J. Paul Sampley and N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Acts – First Corinthians, Vol. 10* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 167.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹ *Ibid.*

prayer and the Spirit go hand-in-hand. Peter was praying and Cornelius was known to God for his prayer. Openness to the Spirit for Peter was the only way a Gentile mission was ever going to be established. The Spirit enables contextual evangelism and prepares willing participants.

Reading the Culture - Paul on the Areopagus: Acts 17:22-31

Hardly a better example of contextual evangelism could be found than that of Paul and his speech in front of the Areopagus. In Acts 17, Paul is heard speaking in the marketplace and invited to share this “new teaching” (verse 19) at the Areopagus. Filled with intellectuals who debate new ideas, Paul addresses their logic, their poets and their idolatry in order to intersect with the Gospel. David Garland comments that any new religion in Athens had to answer three things: the speaker must represent the deity, the deity must inhabit Athens and it must benefit the city.²² Paul addresses these issues in his speech. In verses 22-23 he speaks as though he is a herald. In verses 24-29, Paul claims the God he serves is not bound by place or shrines but rather inhabits the whole earth. Finally, verses 30-31 indicate that God is gracious to the people of earth but now calls forth a response. Paul speaks in a way that the hearers could understand; it is a prime example of reading culture in order to share faith.

Not surprisingly Paul has significantly adapted his message to suit the context. In Acts 13:16-41 Paul preaches to a Jewish audience. In contrast his address in Acts 17 is entirely different. His words intersect mutual interest and reveal a thoughtful approach. Finney comments that, “He began where they were, entered into their thought patterns,

²² David Garland, cited in *Ibid.*, 245.

build upon their existing beliefs, treated them with respect.”²³ Thus he carries his audience with him, indeed his use of logic - if humans are created in the image of God then God is not like what is being represented in the shrines- again speaks to the culture.

Quoting from the poets he segues into contemporary thought. Focusing on the idea of theophany he resonates with his listeners who were used to the gods revealing themselves to humanity.²⁴ It is at this point, once he has established common ground, that he brings in the concept of resurrection. There is no doubt that he is preaching for a decision and is holding up the claims of Jesus’ lordship over all. But he does it in a way that has as little barrier as possible. Indeed as Wall contributes, “The Gospel thoughtfully presented never sounds more attractive to those earnestly searching for ultimate answers.”²⁵ Paul knew that some were eager for spiritual things; he worked hard at removing cultural roadblocks so that he could bring them the truth.

Meeting the Felt Needs of Society: Learning from the Listening

Listening is a critical aspect of contextual evangelism. The three biblical examples cited above contain a strong element of listening. Historically this has not been the institutional church’s strong point and many times evangelism falters for lack of listening. Like many churches, Malvern Uniting launches straight into a variety of faith sharing strategies, bypassing any time spent listening. Indeed one of the great criticisms against Malvern Uniting would be its lack of prayer. Finney adds pertinently, “We need

²³ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 99.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁵ Wall, Sample and Wright, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 249.

boldly to proclaim the ‘beautiful news’ of God's story in Jesus and God's vision for our world, but we need to do it in the way God does it: with patience, with respect, in dialogue.”²⁶ Indeed contextual evangelism should be taken from how God related to humanity through the person and work of Jesus. Two particular areas are vital to change the landscape for Malvern Church: listening to the Holy Spirit and listening to culture.

Listening to the Holy Spirit is one of the primary disciplines of a disciple. On several occasions Jesus finds a quiet place to be alone and pray. His life was marked by closeness to the Father that enabled him to minister with perception and speak with clarity. Jesus knew what God was up to in the world (Mt 3:16) and through the ministry of the Spirit revealed God’s plans to all who would perceive. Indeed he revealed the very nature of God. Paul, it could be argued in his sojourn in the desert (Gal 2:1) after his Damascus road conversion, listened to the Spirit in his new understanding of who Jesus is. John was “in the Spirit,” listening to the Spirit when he saw the great visions he wrote down in Revelation (Rv 1:10). Scripture is full of disciples listening to the Spirit, who go on to effect great change and influence many. The modern church is slow to grasp this way of wisdom and would rather rely on marketing or charismatic personalities for evangelism. Theologically however, it is a strong principle—listening to the Spirit enables effective and potent evangelism that correlates a believer’s activity with the mind of God.

Many who have sought the mind of God have been out of step with the social context. There is an old quip that some are “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.”

²⁶ Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 106.

Listening to society enables the Spirit-inspired knowledge to be applied effectively. Karl Barth famously said that a preacher needs “The Bible in one hand and the newspaper in another.”²⁷ Assuming that God is acting through the believer, it is this conjunction that remains vital for evangelism. Listening to society includes suspending judgement on needs and issues. It requires open-ended questioning and the patience to see beyond the apparent. Many means can be employed to listen. It is this listening that helps discern what society is struggling with and gives off hints as to where the Gospel can be applied.

Bevans comments, “We need to allow the people among whom we work to be our teachers before we presume to teach them.”²⁸ Going back, Paul listened before his experience at the Areopagus. His argument for the unknown God does not seem to be an off the cuff oration.²⁹ His quotes from contemporary poets, and his detailed understanding of the culture all point towards an approach of careful listening. History tells us that John Wesley listened to the needs of the society around him, most who were not in church, and through a series of circumstances set out to reach them for the Gospel. His listening brought an adaption to accepted methodology and birthed a movement.

Following at his heels a century later William Booth took it even further with what one musician³⁰ dubs as a “heart for God and a hand to man.” In Booth these two aspects are combined—Gospel and culture. Both of these evangelists listened to the Holy

²⁷ Karl Barth, “Interview,” *Time Magazine* (May 31, 1963). Although this has been attributed to many people throughout the years, the phrase was probably taken from this interview.

²⁸ Bevans and Tahaafe-Williams, *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, 104.

²⁹ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 101.

³⁰ Geoff Moore, “A Heart to God and a Hand to Man,” on *Evolution*, Geoff Moore and the Distance, Forefront Records, 1993.

Spirit, discerned the need of society and acted accordingly. Myriads of others have listened, acted and made a difference. The point is not lost on Malvern Church. To reach others it needs to listen carefully to social context and the Spirit's voice.

A Faith Sharing Community

The biblical witness leaves no doubt that faith sharing is done in communities. For the early-church community it was the norm. Immediately after the day of Pentecost, a community was formed and this was the pattern repeated wherever believers went. Every type of Christian movement has produced communities that give witness to the Lordship of Christ. The monastic movement, the Moravians, Iona and more recently groups like John Smith's God Squad, are examples of this sort of community. Some groups are itinerant like Paul, John Mark, Luke and Barnabas. By no means do all have to look the same, yet they function with a common purpose.

A healthy church is a community that can have significant outreach. Here one of the great truths of the faith is recovered and put against twenty-first-century Western individual culture: faith is best expressed in community. Indeed it is one of the three purposes of the Church, worship, discipleship and mission. While history proves that not all have been overly functional, communities have provided a means of effective mission into the wider world. Significantly, communities reflect the body metaphor of the Church and allow it to function as God's intent—as a deeply interrelated group of people under the headship of Christ. It is togetherness and the enhancing of other's gifts that makes a Christian community such an effective outreach centre.

Personal Faith Sharing: One-on-one at Opportune Moments

Making up communities are individual members. Even though communities have a significant theological place there has always been room for individuals to share faith. Often it is the individual, functioning with a burning desire, that sparks a community into action. Finney again adds perceptive insight to the discussion when he says, “From its earliest days it [the church] has gained immeasurably from the contribution of those with a private fire in their soul.”³¹ People like William Carey, Hudson Taylor and Mother Teresa are cases in point. Individuals have a place in the economy of God, often as precursors to a movement or renewed cause.

In Western society individuals are the representatives of the community and in effect are the face of Christ to their family, neighbours, colleagues and all others they relate to. Malvern Church relates to these people through the individual members of the congregation. They are the ones who give witness of a life transformed by the message of Jesus. Ravi Zacharias illustrates the importance of the individual: “I have often said that I have little doubt that the single greatest obstacle to the impact of the gospel has not been its inability to provide answers but the failure on our part to live it out.”³² When faith is lived out it provides unique moments for non-Christians to see the life of Christ and opportunities for sharing the hope of Christ. In a postmodern culture, seeing is as important as hearing and thinking often comes through feeling.³³

³¹ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 55.

³² Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 15

³³ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 135.

Relationships then become important, perhaps the most important thing. People trust people more than they will trust an institution. In this day of child sex abuse, institutional religion is seen with suspicion but friendships built on mutual trust are another thing altogether. The results of the *Finding Faith Today* research suggest that over 80 percent of those who have come to faith have done so because of a one-on-one friendship.³⁴ Indeed many friends are drawn together by mutual interest and concern. Therefore it stands to reason a friend would be more likely to respond to the sharing of the Gospel from another friend. As in many cases they are drawn together in the first place by common interest and logically it would seem, resonate with the same aspect of God. Thus the Gospel is shown to be relevant in flesh and blood. Individual friendships that seek opportune moments to share faith are the lifeblood of the Church.

Mentoring for Evangelism: Growing Individuals, Changing the Church

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 said, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” This is a perfect example of mentoring in the Christian tradition that has a long, successful history: from early church fathers like Origen to Gregory, the Franciscans, to Wesley, to contemporary Uniting Church ministers and their mentors as they embark on their first-three years as an ordained minister. Mentoring is important in the life of the Church as a way of passing on knowledge and experience. In fact it is part of the discipling process as one mature believer models and encourages another in the faith.

Mentoring that is particular to evangelism seems to be unheard of in the twenty-first century. Wesley with the class system employed a successful version, but as an

³⁴ As cited in *Ibid.*, 136.

unexpected result of the class meeting. However, Wesley's days were marked by a particular evangelistic fervour. Scriptural precedents, though, have been set. Paul took along the young Timothy, and Barnabas took the troublesome Mark. Both pairs were engaged in new missional opportunities where faith sharing was the norm. Suffice to say that the early church, having seen Paul and Barnabas working like this, could have implicitly assumed the model was the *de facto* way to share faith.

There are many advantages in mentoring for sharing faith. It shares the experience with another and, like the disciples Jesus sent out, it creates an atmosphere of mutual encouragement. It enables knowledge transfer and skills development. Mentoring heats up the value of faith sharing as it changes the culture of the church one person at a time. Maxwell calls this “developing momentum.”³⁵ Mentoring strengthens the link between individual-faith sharing and community-faith sharing. It encourages the Church for they hear and see faith sharing in their midst. But more than just simple encouragement it prepares those willing do the hard work for the task. It is deliberate, instructive and creates accountability. It sets up individuals for success as it provides a safe and nurturing environment to fall down and get back up. Mentoring gives a vehicle for those who are serious about evangelism to begin the journey. More than these reasons, there seems to be a principle at play: God uses prepared midwives to assist at a new birth.

Community Faith Sharing: Creating Space and Trust to Witness Together

The Church needs to act like a body more than ever before to meet the needs of the world. With the decline of the Australian church the issue becomes vivid. In a

³⁵ Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 18.

middle-class suburb like Malvern, however, the issues are multilayered. Theology is straightforward; the Church has the joy to participate in the Kingdom and invite others to join. Yet, pragmatics are complex; a number of questions need to be asked and answered: “Where are these places where like Jesus the church can sit down at the well and share the gospel with a needy, albeit not knowing, person? Where are the Areopagus of 2014 and the market places where ideas can be shared and people be engaged with new and interest provoking ideas? How can a community give witness together to the communal grace of God?” These are hard questions to answer.

Some hints arrive however at mapping the culture of the suburb of Malvern. Research tells a clear story; it is apparent that there are little, if any, safe places to gather in community. With backyards being the preferred option it is hard to find a larger communal gathering that crosses a broad section of society. Schools are the only other larger community gathering in the suburb, but these only cater for a very narrow age range. The Church has long filled this place in society as a cross-generational community. It is important that the body does so again.

A logical way forward would be a contextual evangelism approach to a community event. It is possible that bringing these two together could result in legitimate faith sharing for the suburb of Malvern. Indeed, it would appear that the suburb is hungry for community and looks for genuine safe places to inhabit. If Malvern Church, having listened to the culture and being attentive to the Spirit were to offer a trustworthy, safe place it has the potential to lead to faith sharing. This is where the intersection of individual and corporate (body) evangelism enables legitimate sharing. This is like the

well in the story of Jesus where prepared, mentored individuals can share. It is a concept like a community event whereby the sharing of new ideas, as in the story on the Areopagus, is repeated to a wider audience. Moreover, like Peter and Cornelius, it is the faith to believe that the Spirit is active in all aspects of community life.

One warning though appears on the horizon: trust is a most important thing. While the *Australian Communities Report* indicates that over 25 percent of the Australian population “can be considered ‘warm’ towards Christianity” this is easily damaged.³⁶ A community event cannot be a one-off event. Trust is a slow value to engender. What this means is that Malvern Church must be there for the long haul. Further, reports suggest that many people come to faith over a long period of time.³⁷ Relationships, both individual and with the Church, matter and over time trust is earned. When all these things happen, the way becomes open for the Gospel to be shared. Again taking the context seriously is important.

Jesus: Examining his Practices of Mentoring the Twelve

As a consequence of his time spent with the twelve disciples, Jesus showed how to mentor for contextual evangelism. Jesus was the master at it. There are clues here for modern disciples to follow. A careful reading of the Gospels illustrates many occasions of how Jesus taught his disciples (Mk 4:10, 7:18, 9:31) and that he took pains to explain deeper meanings and Kingdom truths. Over the three-year period the disciples took time

³⁶ Australian Communities Report, 8.

³⁷ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 20, 83.

to come to grips with Jesus' way of life and what it meant for them. Jesus helped them not to have all the answers but to come up with the right questions.

In Peace's seminal study on conversion in the New Testament, he maps out a three-step process for how the twelve came to be converted. These are: insight, turning and transformation.³⁸ These three aspects that Peace outlines in the Gospel of Mark are not only a conversion process but, significantly, models for their effective ministry in the world. It could be argued that this model is on display in Peter's preaching at the day of Pentecost. What this means is that for the twelve, Jesus' pattern of mentoring enabled them to see how others are converted as well. Jesus had this intent at the start as he declared at their initial calling by preparing them to be "fishing for people" (Mk 1:17). It is easy to forget that the disciples were very ordinary men, whose extraordinary achievements were marked by the Spirit's influence and the mentoring of Jesus. Jesus sets his disciples up for the ongoing work of faith sharing and, as illustrated below, the Spirit continues this work in the present age.

The Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:1-23

The parable of the sower illustrates how much context matters for evangelism. Again this provokes a modern perspective for hints on faith sharing. Jesus tells this parable to show how people received the message of the Kingdom and responded to his claim of Lordship. Using it as a teaching (mentoring) opportunity it is one of the few parables that Jesus gives a clear interpretation to. Cited in all three synoptic Gospels it remains one of the most important parables as it discusses where the word falls or, in

³⁸ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 279.

modern speak, how successful is the faith sharing. Using an everyday agricultural simile, Jesus points not to the effectiveness of the seed but to the ground's receptivity. In other words the seed that fell on the three failed soils was as good as the seed, which produced the 30, 60 or a 100 fold. The difference, which is of particular interest to contextual evangelism, is the location in which it is applied.

Different from other parables where the examples are far more clear-cut, this parable offers four choices as to where the seed lands.³⁹ Jesus appears to be saying that there are no places where the Gospel does not apply. Yet he clearly indicates that the receptivity of the soil is the key difference to growth. Here is found a strong reason for contextual evangelism. Metaphorically casting good seed on the path is a waste of effort as it only feeds the birds; likewise the rocky and weedy grounds. Jesus is looking for people who have open hearts to his words so that they might participate in the Kingdom. If Christians listen to the Spirit and map the culture, then their seed sowing, over time, should find receptive ground.

The Spirit Continues the Ministry of Jesus

The great news for the Church is, as much as Jesus mentored his twelve, so the Spirit continues the work of Jesus now. The book of Acts maps this out for the early church, where a group of disciples is timid one day and the next dramatically changed so much that they take on the world. Jesus in John 15:26 says, "The Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" as a clear guideline of what the Spirit will do. The next verse is interesting for evangelism as verse 27 says, "You also are

³⁹ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 74.

to testify.” These two verses are certainly not linked together by coincidence. The Spirit and the Church work hand-in-hand. This becomes crystal clear in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you will be my witnesses.” The Spirit takes over the mentoring work of Jesus in the life of the Church to enable it to share faith effectively. Indeed as Watson comments “It is useless to attempt to witness to Christ, in obedience to his command, without the power of his Spirit.”⁴⁰

What this means is that the Church, under the power of the Spirit, becomes a witnessing community. The Church has to be receptive of the Spirit, for the gifts and fruit of the Spirit enable its mission to be effective. Like those who heard Jesus’ message and embraced it, so too the Church has to be humble under the authority of the Spirit. When it does so, the Spirit through the Church helps to bring Jesus glory and non-Christians hear the message in ways they can understand and respond. Many examples in Acts lead to belief that the Spirit enables believers to be relevant to the culture and speak with greatly reduced barriers for the hearers: Peter’s Spirit-empowered proclamation on the day of Pentecost, Stephen before the council, Philip with the Ethiopian Eunuch, and many more. The Church now, with humbleness, is enabled to step into the culture in the power of the Spirit, with full faith that God blesses evangelistic efforts.

Contextual evangelism is a thoroughly biblical way of sharing faith. Practised by Jesus and the early church it is empowered by the Spirit to invite others into the Kingdom of God. Jesus showed his disciples how to be witnesses by his mentoring. The Church now has the opportunity to continue this work and seek to find relevant and culturally appropriate ways to earn trust and share the Good News of Jesus coming into the world.

⁴⁰ David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), 171.

PART THREE

STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

GOALS AND PLANS

Theological Implications of Contextual Evangelism

God has gifted the Church with the ability to share the Good News of the Kingdom to humanity. Following the example of Jesus and the adaption of the early church, the Spirit continues to enliven the Church for life in the world as God's agent. The Church is designed to be a living witness to God's reign, not hidden behind walls or doors. It shows to the wider non-Christian community that insight, turning and transformation are happening today as a living process and proving that God is active in the world.¹ Further, the Church's very being is one that includes faith sharing as a natural part of its life and daily expression. A church that is not involved in mission, in particular evangelism, fails to live up to its full God-given potential and mandate. Mission is the natural outcome of worship and discipleship.

Evangelism in Context: The Church at Mission on Location

Scripture clearly teaches that the Church is to be on mission. Acting as the body of Christ, the local church is on mission in its local place. God has placed the church in a

¹ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 279.

particular position at a particular time for a significant reason: that others might hear the Good News so that they might understand and respond. A church located in a suburb with a building has the ability not only to be a presence, but to take the time to engender the trust of the local community. It has the opportunity to read the local culture in conjunction with the Gospel and listen for the felt needs. It can hear what the Spirit is saying and act on the particular divine insights. In its life it can be a foretaste of the reign of God, both by words and actions. As Frost says, it becomes an example of “inhabited truth.”² Traditional churches have this possibility like the good seed in Jesus’ parable of the sower. Further, the suburban church has a distinctive part to play in its context; if only it awakens to the mission God has given it.

With this in mind Malvern Uniting Church has a unique part to play in mission. Specifically it is designed to do evangelism as a natural day-to-day happening. The church, though, has to take into consideration its particular and unique context. While Malvern is a suburb like many others in Adelaide the needs of its population are particular to its own microcosmic culture. While the suburb might be shaped a particular way, the Gospel is still applicable to Malvern as it is to any other place on the globe.

God has a heart for the residents of Malvern and theologically it is God’s wish and the Spirit’s work that they be part of his Kingdom. In thinking about contextual evangelism, Paul’s example with those on the Areopagus is salient for Malvern Church. His adaption of the Gospel message is a critical hint of how Malvern Church can relate to a well-educated suburb, and in finding common ground, felt needs and shared experiences, can ultimately introduce the Gospel. Paul’s clever reading of the culture

² Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 55.

illustrates clearly that when cultural barriers are sidestepped there are spiritually hungry people who want to hear about Jesus. The challenge in front of Malvern Church is significant.

With a strong imbedded culture of being the bastion of religion in the suburb, and with an assumed method of faith that hinges on preaching and song, it has to work very hard in order to engage in contextual evangelism. The church has only just begun to explore the felt needs of society and the above are a few of the many barriers inherent in church tradition which preclude others from hearing the Gospel. Malvern Church is only just working out where the points of real contact could be.

It remains firmly in a Uniting Church DNA that serving is seen as the “key.” While serving for an Australian culture is significant, faith sharing must be its companion. Service and sharing are bedfellows. For Malvern Church contextual evangelism is a growing idea that has yet to reach its full potential. It could well be that those who have begun to understand the notion of contextual evangelism are not yet prepared for the disruption of normal church life that will ensue. Responding to the call of God in something like this strategy destroys comfort and upsets formal traditions. For an institutional church there is safety in tradition. Nevertheless with courage, careful planning, contextual thinking, prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doorway remains wide open for the church relevantly to engage with the local suburb.

The Value of Individual's Role in Evangelism

As has been discussed individuals play a pivotal role in contextual evangelism. While there is a significant theology of the Church as body, as to be expected, individuals

form its parts. Each person contributes a unique perspective to the body and enables it to function as intended. Missing body parts mean a disability that renders elements of the church inoperable. With the confusion over what is evangelism and how conversion takes place, many members of the church have latent gifts in evangelism.

For the church, this is untapped potential and represents untold lost opportunities. With this being true an individual member is vital to evangelism. Further, the individual is critical to relationships. The relationships of church members enable day-to-day faith sharing in all sorts of places. Church members live and work in a huge variety of locations, and where they do they can be examples of a lived out faith. Their family relationships have proven to be significant in faith sharing.³ Even more so, the sole church member is the bridge that ties the church community to the non-Christian.

It is friendship that enables the Gospel to be shared in a safe way. An American pastor tweeted this to illustrate the friendship point with clarity: “You cannot bring your enemies to Jesus they must become your friends first. Before people trust Jesus they want to know if you can be trusted.”⁴ Relationships matter and nothing will suffice for the individual’s role in evangelism.

Malvern Church is made up of many individuals. Overwhelmingly many of them are committed, loyal and generous towards the church. The church is managing in worship and discipleship but lacking in mission expressed in evangelism. The reproductive aspect of the body does not function as it naturally should. Yet there remains ample scope for this to change and develop. Many members of Malvern Church

³ Australian Communities Report, p7.

⁴ Rick Warren, as re-tweeted by Mark Conner (accessed September 19, 2014).

are white-collar professionals who hold respectable jobs and are highly trusted individuals in society. Trust is not an issue. Nor are personal relationships, as church members remain well connected. The bridge to share faith is well established. Yet there is dysfunction in faith sharing. Fear it seems, might be one cause, and there are a number of reasons for this: uncertainty in how to answer questions that arise from a conversation about Jesus, how to articulate faith, how to explain and defend the Bible, where to start if someone asks a question, and even fear or rejection. There is fear also that a conversation about faith might interrupt the “nice Christianity” that is part of Malvern culture. These things block conversations about faith. Another issue could be the actual business of life.

Many members are high achievers who work long hours and do not have much discretionary time. However, the overriding understanding of evangelism as seen in Paul’s conversion could well be the most significant barrier to making the first step. This is exactly what Peace means saying, “How we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”⁵ If a survey on biblical examples of conversion was done the suspicion would be that Paul’s Damascus road experience would be first, followed by the experience of Philip and the Ethiopian. This is case in point as both events are one off. In comparison one would think that the disciples were converted, only to be dull witted in what Jesus was talking about. Thus Malvern Church has many problems in the way it perceives and fears evangelism, each one adding to the overall reticence of sharing faith.

Another blocker for Malvern Church and individual involvement relates around who can do evangelism. With very little display of faith sharing as a cultural norm there is no role model as to who can actually share faith. This complicates the matter. The

⁵ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 286.

popular perception is that only experts can share faith. Of course many members believe the Bible, but the Bible people and Bible evangelists are perceived as special people and not like a normal church member, certainly not like a Malvern member. Of course the minister and church staff share faith; they are professional Christians and have received special training. Billy Graham shares faith but “I’m not like him, nor could I be” is the dominating thought. This thinking debilitates the average church member to even contemplate a conversation about faith. Even the strongest encouragement to share faith would then be met with a blank stare as if to say, “They must be talking to someone else not me, as I am not an evangelist.”

The Value of Group Mentoring as Leadership for the Whole Congregation

Mentoring for evangelism enhances the ability of individuals in a church to share faith. In fact it tears down the walls of resistance to faith sharing. It tackles head-on the presuppositions and half-truths of popular perception. Further, when individuals share faith they enliven the body. They become what Maxwell describes as “impact players.”⁶ Experience tells there is nothing like the encouragement of the conversion of a new believer to energize a church. The transformation of an individual that Peace talks about in the conversion process is revitalizing for a community of faith.⁷

A direct result of intentional mentoring raises the temperature on the culture of evangelism and again this affects the whole church. It gives leadership to this critical area of the life of the church by showing others the value of faith sharing. Jesus showed how

⁶ Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 40.

⁷ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 286.

effective and important this was as he mentored the twelve and as they came to slowly realise his work and the outworking of the Kingdom. His mentoring prepared the disciples for the task ahead after his ascension. Incidentally this would seem to relate well to those in postmodern culture as for them the journey is important and relationships matter. From the Gospels it is seen how Jesus mentored over three years on one long journey with the disciples as companions. Mentoring is effective for individuals and the church and leads into a new way of being.

A mentoring effort would be well received at Malvern Church. Many white-collar employees now receive mentoring as part of their ongoing professional development. Thus it would fit well with the way culture is presently working. Mentoring would apply to the struggle that Malvern Church has with “only experts doing evangelism” and the Pauline example of “one off conversion event” thinking. Mentoring directly addresses in style that conversion is often a process not just an event; that is to say, mentoring takes time, like conversion. Further, the content can be augmented to show exactly that as well.

It would be important for the church to show that the twelve disciples similarly took time to fully realise who Jesus was. Mentoring for Malvern Church also offers training in listening, as all participants have to pay close attention to what the other is saying and how they are saying it. In fact it would alleviate much of the fear associated with faith sharing as those fear-inducing issues could be continually discussed and resolved. A small group setting would enable a larger discussion to be had and input garnered from multiple sources. Mentoring for Malvern Church has the potential to be overwhelmingly beneficial.

A Whole Church Working Together in Evangelism

While individuals play their part, it is the whole church's responsibility to be involved in evangelism. Growing out of worship and discipleship, mission as expressed in evangelism, generates a synergy far beyond the individual members. With the Holy Spirit's empowerment a group of people under Jesus as Lord have been able to effect wonderful change in society. A church on mission lives out the commands of Jesus.

The implication for a theology of working together in evangelism is clear for Malvern Church; it has a lot to learn about mission. It has a lot to learn about God's desire for those who do not yet believe and the *Missio Dei*. While the church knows about strategic plans, KPI's and business models it has not grasped the full realisation that God is inviting its involvement in what the Spirit is up to in the world. Indeed it still has a way to go to learn about acting in harmony with a single goal in mind.

Western, educated, postmodern minds are not always warm toward conformity and do not always respond to authority (even that of God), particularly when that goal is to benefit others with no guarantee of any return on the investment of time and resources. Yet the efforts it has undertaken in mission and the tentative steps to engage have left the church with a sense of purpose and community. There is an embryonic sense of togetherness and a hint that maybe the church could do something more than worship, go to Bible study and pay the staff. What is yet to be discovered by the church is that working together harnesses all the spare and not so spare resources possible, and puts them at God's disposal for mission and brings about a radical change.

A Preferred Future: Every Member Involved in Evangelism as a Way of Life

Several people at Malvern Church are beginning to ask the same question posed by Hirsch: “Will more of the same do the trick?”⁸ That is, will being a traditional church in the same form for over a hundred years make any difference to the culture? The answer is of course no. Not only no, but a resounding no. A future that only lives into more of the same will be a very short future indeed. While God’s Kingdom is not about numbers but about changed lives, the stark reality remains for the Australian church and eventually Malvern Church. Churches are declining in Australia. The goal then is to enable Malvern Church to reach out into the Malvern suburb with the Gospel in a way that is relevant, meets felt needs and contains as few barriers as possible to belief.

To move Malvern Church in significant engagement with the community and to create a change in church culture, a particular strategy will be employed. First, individuals who have a leaning towards evangelism will be identified. They will be invited into a small group called a cluster where mentoring in evangelism will take place. Over a period of three months this cluster will be encouraged to share faith with those people they relate to every day. Experiences will be debriefed, reviewed and celebrated. Over the three-month period various resources will be used to equip cluster members. Concurrently, the church will hear sermons on faith sharing, be encouraged to read on faith sharing, and Bible study groups will study the topic. At the end of the cluster period, all members will be encouraged and supported to befriend at least one other member of the church and mentor them in evangelism. Close to the end of this process the church

⁸ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 16.

will move towards either one of its regular Christmas Street Parties or an Easter Children's Carnival.

This has proved to be a culturally relevant way of engaging with the community in a shared space by blocking off the street. During this time it is expected that cluster members and those they mentor will actively seek an opportunity to share faith with someone from the local community who is not a Christian. It is hoped that this process will be repeated in the years to come. However, it is eagerly anticipated that this experience might lift the culture in the church towards faith sharing both as an individual effort and as a community team.

The preferred future for Malvern Church is one of everyday faith sharing. It would mean that the three functions of the Church: worship, discipleship and mission are all evident in equal parts. Further there is a culture of sharing faith that is a natural part of life for Malvern Church.

The Strategy Goals

Several questions arise from a reflection on the preferred future. These questions include: What then are the strategy goals that need to be put into place; What does Malvern church need to know to enact a faith sharing culture; What does Malvern Church need to be exposed to; and What things does it need to do to travel the road of faith sharing? This relates both as individual members and as a whole church community.

Teaching God's Plan for Evangelism through the Church

To live out its biblical mandate Malvern Church needs to understand God's design for the Church. God has a plan for the Church to participate in the sharing of the Good News in the world. As part of the strategy to create a faith-sharing community the first goal for Malvern Church is to teach that God actually has a plan for the church and, importantly, that they as a local community are included in that plan.

What the strategy helps the church see is that God uses ordinary people like the disciples, the early church and others through history to share faith. This is a vital step in creating a culture of conversion growth that produces the change in the church and affects the Malvern suburb. Teaching is important for Malvern Church; with so many well-educated members it is the primary way many absorb information. Teaching fits the context of the church as the recognised formal way of transferring knowledge.

Understanding and Embracing how Individual and Whole-church Evangelism Happens

The second goal centres around understanding the way evangelism is enacted both at a corporate and individual level and to see both types embodied. This strategy is divided into two parts. Part one ensures that there is a cognitive understanding of individual and corporate evangelism. The church needs to comprehend that individual and whole church evangelism are significantly different yet vitally connected. It is important that church members know they personally have a role in evangelism and how this works in their context. This personal evangelism adds to the church wide effort.

But church-wide evangelism is more than just a collection of individuals; the church has to understand that they are the body of Christ on location. Importantly, the

church as the body needs to grapple with contextual evangelism. Contextual evangelism for the whole church is far more problematic than for individuals. Part two of the goal is that both individuals and the church embrace or, in effect, live out the knowledge that comes from how evangelism takes place. The goal is that in taking on a more faith-sharing life both as individuals and as a corporate body there will be more faith sharing.

Enabling Members of Malvern to Share Faith and Influence Others to Do the Same

The third strategy centres around a behavioural change for the church. It is working on the presupposition that knowledge leads to actual modification of the way an individual lives and acts. This goal works on the premise that once a few people are enabled to share faith then it opens the way for a positive influence on other members of the church. Faith sharing by a few, it is hoped, would have a direct bearing on the culture of Malvern Church, thus making possible an overall theme of evangelism to be birthed.

Enable Members of Malvern to Share Faith at a Community Festival

The final goal of the strategy centres on making an opportunity for individual and corporate faith sharing. This is a further behavioural goal for the church and one that fits into contextual evangelism on a church-wide scale. It centres on individuals who now know and have embraced evangelism as God's plan for the church and as a day-to-day expression of faith. This goal provides the vehicle whereby the whole church has a real opportunity and reason to share faith to the Malvern suburb. A community festival for those prepared is a culturally sensitive and opportune time to share faith.

The Content of the Strategy

The strategy must address how this preferred future is lived out in the life of Malvern Church. With goals being set, details for the strategy must be addressed. How the strategy is enacted in a way that brings lasting and sustainable change to the culture of the church so that it develops in evangelism as a day-to-day habit must be a focus. Also, change must be brought to the church and then have a positive impact on the suburb of Malvern. This is the substance of the discussion below.

Invitation and Participation in a Three-month Mentoring Group

The detail of the strategy begins with the formation of a small group called a cluster. It is in this cluster that mentoring for contextual evangelism will take place. Unlike other church events this will not be open to the whole congregation. This will be an invitation only group of selected individuals, ideally six plus the minister. Those who are identified as strong in evangelism, or having the characteristics of an evangelist, will be approached to join the cluster. Reliance upon the insight of the Holy Spirit will be paramount in the decision of who to invite into the cluster.

Wholehearted participation by members is vital to the effectiveness of the cluster. Cluster members are asked to commit to the process and not miss a cluster gathering except in the event of unavoidable circumstances. Loyalty to the process is vital for the success of the strategy and its ongoing impact for the whole church. Indeed, it is critical that these first members of the cluster are ready to engage and be enthusiastic about the strategy and goals. While a fuller discussion on the attributes of members will be detailed below, cluster participants must be sold on the idea that God is active in the world and

using the Church to share the Gospel. Further, they must have a deep conviction that the Gospel is transformational to those who accept it and invite Jesus to be Lord of their life. Cluster members have to give witness to the activity of the Spirit in their own life and display openness to the work of the Spirit in the wider world.

Having identified members of the cluster, the three-month mentoring begins in earnest. It is anticipated that this will be an intense period in the life of the cluster members with weekly get-togethers. The topic of the group is well defined and will focus the members clearly on one track. The purpose of the cluster is to advance evangelistic efforts in the lives of those in the group. It is to see in thought and action how contextual evangelism works in their lives.

As this strategy is begun in this small group of the church it is important that the whole congregation is kept well informed of the details. Everyone needs to know the direction this is headed and what it means as church members. It has significant implications for the church as this cluster is the incubation room from where the culture of evangelism is grown and developed.

Mentoring Sessions on Contextual Evangelism

Once the cluster is chosen and formed, the real work of the group can begin. Using existing material the cluster will begin to discuss the way an individual can share faith with a friend. Initially the group will talk about sharing faith, pray about opportunities to share faith and talk about ways in the past they have seen evangelism done, both good and bad. This will also include time spent examining the conversion experience of both Paul and the twelve disciples. Questions asked will be along the lines

of what does the biblical witness teach about conversion; how this differs from today's understanding and experience; how much ideas of evangelism are governed by one particular model of faith sharing. Having an informed and honest open dialogue about these topics will add to the process immensely. Building on the biblical understanding of conversion is critical in the process as this allows the Holy Spirit to be an active participant in the group. It is expected that the Spirit will enlighten the Scriptures to the clusters and reveal truth not yet seen or understood. All this will create a wide understanding of conversion and how God is active in different ways in the process.

Early on in the cluster the group will be encouraged to share faith with someone they already know. This includes actively seeking opportunities, not just waiting for them to come along. It is the willingness to go beyond comfortable nice Christianity that this group is really all about. It is being energetic in faith sharing that will spark other members of the group towards action. Indeed once one person has had enough courage to step out in faith and share the Gospel it fans the flame of the remaining members.

Everyone is motivated. Couple this with specific prayers for each other to daily share faith and the group garners energy of its own to self-regulate. Of course a healthy dose of accountability in the mix adds to the climate change that can be had in a group like this. There is nothing like being accountable to others to motivate action. When accountability is given to the other members of the group, and expectations are high in relaying exactly how events panned out every week, things happen and actions change.

Contextual evangelism is a significant point of discussion for this cluster group. It is true that contextual evangelism does not seem to be such a big issue for individuals

when they share faith with someone they know. They are already in a relationship with their friends and so they understand the context. Trust of course is important but again, when a cluster member shares with a friend there is already a trusting relationship. However as this group develops, it matures in evangelism and it looks to give leadership to the whole congregation, is when context becomes important. Particularly as the whole church moves towards a wider-scale evangelistic outreach like the street party or a children's carnival context becomes everything. Systems have a way of disregarding essential details and overlooking glaringly obvious facts. If contextual evangelism is part of the discussion at the beginning then it might have a far greater chance to alleviate the cookie-cutter approach. It would essentially place resourced people in the heart of the church that would be on the lookout for anything that was borrowed or brought in from an outside context that has not been through the lens of the local context.

The whole mentoring approach to contextual evangelism: the training, the discussion, the listening, the practicing, the accountability, the testing, is all-important for the whole church. It begins to augment the culture of the church and give a vision of what could be if only people were prepared and courageous. Mentoring in this sense sets up the cluster for success and the church for action.

Cluster Training Resources

There are many resources that can be used to assist in the formation of evangelists. The cluster group will need to choose carefully the ones it listens to. While there are not many up to date, off-the-shelf Australian manuals, some overseas ones can, with a little work, be adapted. Indeed the very nature of contextual evangelism demands

this be done. Bill Hybels offers a resource titled *Just Walk Across the Room*; however it seems better for this project to focus on the work of Peace and his twelve sessions for groups titled *Holy Conversations: Talking about God in Everyday Life*. This study relates well to where Christians are at and carefully coaches a thoughtful dialogue process with non-Christians. His resource moves across all the basic issues of faith and the Gospel to a large section on actually talking about the faith. Carefully applied to the context, Peace's workbook offers an excellent resource for the cluster.

Small Group Studies and Whole Church Teaching on Evangelism

Concurrent to the mentoring of the cluster is a strategy deploying a whole church emphasis on evangelism. While the church is informed of the cluster's existence and purpose, broader measures can be used to train and teach. These measures continue to highlight evangelism and assure a receptive audience to the ultimate goal of the project. Over time, when a theme is shared, developed, thought about and discussed, it achieves a far greater rate of success. Involving the whole church in the basic theme is critical to changing the culture. It begins the process of movement from one state to a desired outcome. Success comes easier when, how this church culture operates, is understood.

For example, educated people do not like to be surprised in things they want to have a say about, especially if it is to do with their comfort,⁹ and in this case a change to the church direction. With this church's culture being about tradition and comfort, introducing evangelism as a cultural factor means a seismic change is afoot. In particular, members do not really like to be surprised in the area of evangelism especially when they

⁹ I say comfort because many people see evangelism as anything but comfortable.

think the leadership has expectations of their involvement. This is due to the thinking on conversion and evangelism, which is skewed toward the Pauline example. A re-education process must take that into consideration and, over time, redefine what evangelism is.

This whole church focus would be best done with a four-pronged approach that fits the context of Malvern Church. First, Malvern values preaching so a sermon series on evangelism would be relevant. This would take the form of examples from the Scriptures that show different conversion experiences and how people have adapted the message of the Gospel to fit with the hearers. Those biblical examples in preceding chapters already covered would be very helpful. Small group studies would also be well received. Small groups give members a chance to think, discuss and digest new ideas and biblical themes. Malvern Church has a strong history of meeting in small groups so quality material, even some similar to the cluster, would be helpful in raising the awareness of evangelism.

Third, with Malvern Church being such a well-educated church many are keen to read. Any reading material disseminated on evangelism would be taken and read. Books like *The Gospel Blimp*, *The King Jesus Gospel*, *The Great Omission* and *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission* would all be popular and aid in the process of raising the bar on evangelism. Finally, the congregation values story. Stories in a worship setting engender an attentive audience. Incorporating stories in the worship service of how people came to faith, who invited them, how they sensed the reality of God and what the key turning points were that led to faith would be very helpful. Indeed people remember stories much more than they remember facts. For some people to present a witness or give a testimony in a service is just too much. To enable more people to be heard it is

often good to use an interview style of conversation. A good interviewer can draw a great story from a shy person. However it is communicated, it is clear a church-wide information strategy must be used to convey the importance and truth of evangelism.

Participants then Exert Influence in the Church

The cluster group is the key to this strategy being successful. It is their influence that will play a deciding factor to change the culture of the church. Their input will raise the fervour of evangelism at Malvern Church. The plan is a simple one: once the cluster group has been mentored and given time to discuss their learning and process a biblical understanding of conversion and evangelism, they are primed to share faith. Once they have deliberately shared faith and maybe even led someone to Jesus they become evangelists for evangelism. If cluster members get enthusiastic for evangelism then others in the church who are inclined towards evangelism will catch the same vibe.

It is here where the original cluster members could do their best work. For once they find a person who is excited about evangelism they then have a new person-to-mentor into evangelism. If this were to happen only once, then the original cluster group would be doubled with twice the number of people existing in the church who are looking for opportunities to share faith.

While Malvern Church does many things in the community it is best known for its bigger events. Over the years it has earned the trust of the suburb by serving and engaging beyond its borders. It has made several attempts to be a church outside its walls. With the cluster working as a cultural change agent in the congregation and influencing others it has the effect of raising the fervour of evangelism. With a cluster group and

those they are mentoring, members of the congregation begin to notice that there are people who take evangelism seriously and actually do it. Slowly the influence spreads and the church begins to change.

Run a Community Festival that Involves the Suburb of Malvern

Every year the church runs an opportunity to share faith as a corporate event. Every year Malvern Church blocks the street off at the front of the property and holds a street party in the first week of Advent, normally the first Sunday afternoon in December. This street party has become a highly anticipated event in the suburb and one that is talked about all year. It has run every year since it began in 2008. Augmenting this event is the Children's Carnival, normally run just prior to Easter on Palm Sunday afternoon. However it is the street party that is the best attended with somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 people attending.

The street party is a combination of free activities, public entertainment and low-cost consumables. The event is divided into various aspects and tries to cater for the whole spectrum of the community. The stage is the centrepiece of the event. It is where the bands play, musicians perform and from which the MCs conduct proceedings. With a microphone being used, most people hear what is being said, introduced or sung. To the side of the stage are children's activities that include a bouncy castle, kids' petting zoo, craft activities and games. There is also a teenager area that has Sumo Suits and electronic games. There is a food section including a cafe, pancakes, fruit salad, ice cream, BBQ, drinks and the very popular curry stall. Many outside, non-church vendors also come to sell craftwork and jewellery.

The church halls have held such things as a Christmas tree festival, ginger bread figure making and face painting. Scattered around the event are toy stalls, a water dunking machine and old fashioned games like knock the cans over, hay hunt and bean bag toss. Of particular interest has been the “spat the rat” game. Most of these activities are free, including the bouncy castle. Church tours are also offered with the history of the church, pulpit, organ and stain glass windows explained. Weather permitting, this has the potential to exponentially attract crowds.

The strategy depends on cluster members and those they have mentored being in attendance at the street party. Normally most members of Malvern would be in a serving role as it requires hundreds of volunteers. There are a wide variety of roles that put people in contact with the community. Every now and again someone will ask, “Who runs this?” and “Why are you running this?” This is the exact point where someone prepared to share faith could answer and maybe even get a chance to share with a contextual version of the Gospel. In fact, because of the mentoring and desire of the cluster member to share faith, God would likely bring along a person who is ready to hear the Good News and be open to discuss spiritual things.

God uses prepared midwives at a new birth. It is this sharing that leads to a further conversation, church attendance or invitation for children to participate in the upcoming Kids Club or a wide variety of other church-based activities. This is not so that the person enquiring is bombarded with church-based activities, but that the conversation might continue. If indeed it is true that people in the suburb of Malvern are isolated and lonely

this provides a significant key to unlocking the door for the Gospel to penetrate. It is contextual faith sharing that relies on human preparation and the Spirit's work.

Participant Selection and Leadership

The vital importance of leadership over the last few decades has increasingly been recognised. In the modern era churches have risen and fallen on leadership. For this strategy goal, the leadership rests with the cluster group. With the future of the culture change towards evangelism depending largely on the success of the cluster group, careful selection is vital. This pilot group will determine the effectiveness of the strategy and if any future attempts will be made to repeat the process. Naturally much prayer and discernment will go into the selection of participants at all stages of this project.

Participant Selection: Staff Selects Six Disciples with Passion for Evangelism

The best vehicle for cluster participant selection is through the eyes of the current Malvern Church staff. There is a simple reason for this. The church staff has developed over the years a perception for the needs and talents of the membership. All members of the staff lead ministry teams. Collectively the staff knows every member and most of them at a reasonable depth. They are well placed to do the work of discernment.

The criteria for invitation and selection into the cluster must be clear. Obviously the individual must have a living and vital faith that is displayed with a love for Jesus and through the gifts of the Spirit. A depth of faith is a characteristic that will be vital to this process. High on the list is the evidence of gifting by the Spirit in order to share faith. The question asked here is a simple one: is there discernment that leads us to believe God

wants to use this person in evangelism? They must have a desire towards sharing faith and, even if they have not done so, must be willing to try.

A person committed towards the church, who has been seen to serve the church is another must. They must also be willing to learn, listen and obey the Spirit of God. Of a slightly lesser importance is their age; it would be good to have a wide age range; the same is of course true with gender. Occupation is important, if only for a wide variety of places to share and relate the Gospel. One particular consideration is that an individual's standing in the church community as being the right person, can bring church-wide respect to the process.

Selection for something like this is a difficult process. Sometimes a closed-door session, prayer and a white board is enough to make the choices. Other times an interview process is best. In this case, it seems that a combination of both would be wise. Staff does their discerning privately and bringing recommendations to a closed-door meeting. This is a prayerful time where the Spirit of God is listened to carefully. Once this has taken place those people who the staff believed were suitable are invited in for a conversation on the selection criteria. If they met the criteria and were willing to wholeheartedly participate in the process an invitation would be extended.

Participant Development: Pastor-led Facilitation and Mentoring of Cluster Group

With so much depending on the outcome of this important group the senior pastor will lead. This does a number of things: it keeps the vision of the outcome firmly on the agenda and lets the whole church know the importance of the cluster. As already noted the cluster is the key to the success of this strategy so all resources need to be employed

to facilitate growth. Using Peace's *Holy Conversations* leads the group in a clearly defined, step-by-step process over three months. Their thinking, group reflection, discussion and acting on evangelism will develop over the time they are in the cluster. This will be a place of mutual support and prayer-filled encouragement. Normal cluster meetings will last a couple of hours as due time is given for all to participate.

Church-wide Participation

Essential to the strategy is the participation of the whole church community. The cluster would not be able to exert any influence if the congregation members were reluctant to participate. For Malvern Uniting to be a faith-sharing community, everyone must believe they are included in God's plan to reach the world and that they have something to offer. A theology of the body and an understanding of the mission of God have to be enacted in the people of God. Change happens slowly in organisations and even slower in an institution that has had a proud history for nearly 125 years. But change can come through the influence of leadership and the work of the Spirit.

It is this partnership that will bring about a culture of faith sharing and make a difference to the suburb. Cluster group members will have to exercise discernment as they seek to find another person to influence and train for faith sharing. They will be looking for exactly the same type of person the staff team was trying to discover. In fact if the cluster group members were to lead someone to Jesus for the first time, these would be the ideal people to mentor. Attention to evangelism will be raised by the church-wide emphasis on faith sharing through sermons, Bible study groups, literature including online media and personal story sharing. A wider community event is the perfect way to

focus the efforts toward an end point. It gives the cluster, those mentored and the whole church a defined time to work toward and see if the strategy works. After an event like this it is the perfect time to stop and review the strategy and implement any changes.

Invitations Extended to the Wider Community and Broad Church Networks

One of the assumed factors in running a community event is that the community will actually turn up. Historically this has proven true, but with a period like the weeks before Christmas nothing can be taken for granted. In order to share faith, there needs to be someone to share faith with. This only happens if the wider community knows an event is going to be run and they are invited to attend. The Malvern Church building is fortunate to be placed on a busy side street. While it is not on a main road it is a large attractive building and dominates the landscape of the suburb. A banner placed out in the front coupled with the magnetic lettered sign reaches many people as they walk and drive past. However invitations ensure good coverage of the suburb and surrounding areas.

One of the best ways to garner attendance is to invite other local groups to participate. This also has the added advantage of ensuring that the event is contextual. Many groups are only too willing to involve themselves in a community event. In fact most church members are involved in wider community clubs and social activities and these are easily approached to attend, contribute and participate in the event. Some groups like the Girl Guides are happy to be present and hand out flyers. Other groups like vocal or music groups could contribute on stage. Malvern's networks also extend to the Junior School where chaplaincy is provided. This school could be asked to contribute a drama or a musical item. It is a sure thing that if children are involved then their parents

and grandparents will be more than happy to attend. There is plenty of scope to invite many for a legitimate reason in the hope that faith may be shared with some by people who are prepared and prayerfully listening to the Spirit.

Conclusion

More than ever before, Malvern Church needs to be a faith-sharing community. It has a God-given mandate to fulfill and make a unique contribution to the suburb. The church is placed in this context for a reason and a purpose. Using the talents that are mostly inactive in the church can begin to lift the profile of evangelism and change the church culture. Leadership given by the cluster group is the key ingredient to a renewed focus on evangelism. Using this tool the door to the community can be unlocked.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

Malvern Uniting has the necessary ingredients in place to connect with its surrounding suburb, but not the ability to enact an effective outreach that can share the Gospel. To do this it needs to facilitate an internal culture change. Implementing a strategy centred on evangelism will activate latent potential, open space for the Spirit and begin the process of change. This is an “inside out” process.

Pilot Project Summary - A Mentoring Group Working on Contextual Evangelism

To encourage Malvern Uniting to become a faith-sharing community a detailed strategy has been unfolded. The change begins with a cluster group that meets specifically for mentoring on evangelism. Once they have finished the cluster mentoring process they are to seek out another to mentor in evangelism. This is directed towards a street party where opportunities exist not only to serve, but to seek to share faith with the local community in a contextually sensitive way.

Timeline

Organising the time lines to allow appropriate space for all participants is critical to the success of the strategy. If times are too tight then not enough preparation will be done to equip those involved. On the other hand, if too much time is allowed then the congregation will tire of the theme, and energy for the whole impetus will flag. A careful eye must be kept on the progress and a strict timeline observed. The biggest given of the strategy is the annual street party. In 2015, the date set is December 6. Everything needs to be worked from this fixed point in order to make it run smoothly.

Working backwards in the strategy from the street party brings the next critical point. It is the cluster group having an influence on members of the congregation. This is where the initial cluster members mentor another church person who has the gifting and potential to be an evangelist. While not being as structured and certainly far more organic than the cluster meetings it will still take some time to affect this goal. A period of up to two months should be sufficient to enable this peer mentoring to take place. This means that October 4, 2015 would be the start date for this phase. Group members would be free to meet and gather at any time suitable to them. It might also be helpful in this stage to have two or three catch ups with both cluster and those newly being mentored. It is envisaged that this would happen in this two-month period.

Prior to the cluster members working with another person in the congregation is the cluster itself. The cluster is the next most important date to trigger a calendar marker. This has been set for a three-month period. Three months of weekly meetings is a heavy commitment for a group of busy people. However, in its defence, three months allows

enough time to explore the topic of contextual evangelism in depth and to give time for actual evangelism. It also is enough time for the group to trust each other and give mutual support in their efforts to share faith with their friends.

Three months is also the time it will take to work through the workbook *Holy Conversations*. While this is possibly a tight time, it does not let the group drag out and, more to the point, keeps the commitment short with a better chance of full attendance and success. A Sunday afternoon for a couple of hours is a good possible time when many people are free. Not many regular commitments happen later on a Sunday afternoon. This group should be underway by at least July 5, 2015 if not a week earlier, to ensure the group settles in before the study gets underway.

The initial, or discerning, stage for cluster selection is done by the staff. This in effect can begin at any stage prior but not less than six weeks before the cluster group has its first meeting. This means the staff then needs to have names sorted out in order for invitations to be issued by May 24, 2015. There is some flexibility in this first process as most people approached would make up their mind reasonably fast. It is not anticipated that people will take longer than a week to decide. However this date allows ample time if some say no and others need to be invited. Further it gives some wriggle room if a further search is needed to find other candidates.

The congregation should be informed at the very beginning of the process. The ideal time would be in the late-May period. However, the sermons and group studies can begin at any time. As always it is best to avoid any school holidays and public holidays so as to communicate to as many people as possible. Families tend to go away during

school and public holidays. The best time in this period would be the end of July in the third term, which runs from the July 20 through September 25, 2015. This would enable a six-week preaching series on evangelism and an eight-week Bible study program.

The Bible study could focus around the notes of the sermons with augmented questions. The six-week sermons and eight-week Bible studies give time for groups to focus on the topic with some extra room for a social night or any weeks where they are unable to meet. Sermon notes and questions can be uploaded on the Malvern Church website for easy access by all groups. Sermons are also podcasted for easy reference by the groups. Groups could listen to the portions of the sermon at the start of the group.

If there were groups who pick up the *Holy Conversations* workbook then there is no reason why they cannot run into the fourth term, in November. Anytime beginning from when the cluster program is first announced would be good to circulate literature and promote online resources in evangelism. Later in the year, about six weeks prior to the street party, would be a very good time to use story, interviews and testimonies in worship. This last strategy would keep the focus on faith sharing alive and simmering as the church heads towards the event on December 6. Late-October and all of November would be good for stories in worship.

Following the street party is a difficult time, as the run up to Christmas is often frantic. Everyone is busy and time is at a premium. However it is important to garner immediate feedback of the event. Constructive feedback for the whole process is important to ensuring its success in the years to come. The three weeks prior to Christmas then are the critical times for ensuring people give feedback of how they went, what their

perceptions were and if they actually had a conversation of faith. A catch up with the cluster group and those they mentored would be the best way to get feedback from those who were trained. The use of an online survey whereby the church office sent out the link electronically is the best way to get as much feedback as desired in this busy period.

Leadership Development of Cluster Group

As has already been stated, the critical element in the strategy is the function of the cluster. The leadership they will exert in the congregation is substantial and decisive. Without an effective and enthusiastic cluster the drive for Malvern Uniting to be a faith-sharing community falters. The main purpose of the cluster is to develop people in the skills of evangelism. It is to give the group the theological understanding, tools and confidence to be evangelists. While it is not asking the cluster to stand on a street corner, it is requiring them to be active in sharing faith with their friends and family.

Identification of Cluster Members

For the staff to discern potential cluster members is a large responsibility. Taking the task seriously this staff would have been thinking and praying about who could be involved as early as February 2015. Using the gifts of the Spirit, they spend time listening to the voice of the Spirit. This might include staff times of prayer and fasting for God's insight into exactly who the right people are. Currently staff meets formally once a week. These meetings are normally full of ordinary business of the church and often have to be rushed to complete all of the agenda. This cluster selection should be high on the priority at those meetings. However, to do justice another meeting would be set aside for the

explicit purpose of discernment and prayer. This is difficult in an already full schedule; however as so much rides on the cluster, it must take precedence over other matters.

Cluster Group Sessions

The cluster group mentoring sessions would meet for two hours. They will have a relatively formal beginning to the meeting with a recap of the last week's topic and accountability questions for each member of the group. The topic from the previous week comes from *Holy Conversations*. Accountability questions are to ascertain how group members did with sharing faith. The questions include: did you share faith with a non-Christian this week; if not, why not; if so what was the inroad you used to share; what lessons did you learn from either experience; how would you approach the week again if you had the chance? Then there would be a time for other group members to ask insightful questions. This part of the mentoring meeting would last about 45 minutes. Then the group would work through another chapter in *Holy Conversations*, discussing key points with agreements and disagreements. After another 45 minutes the group would transition into setting goals for the week ahead and a significant time of prayer for God's direction and wisdom to share faith.

Prior to the cluster meetings getting underway the senior pastor has marked out time in his diary to prepare. This includes already reading through *Holy Conversations* well in advance. Diarising time means that there is space to devote time to cluster preparation. It is the discipline of the senior pastor that will further enhance the success of the group. Finally, the senior pastor must daily pray for the members of the cluster and those whom God is setting aside to be mentored next.

Knowledge Transfer

The system by which cluster members identify and influence a new breed of evangelists is designed to be fluid. The cluster is structured to follow guidelines and a system. However, once this is ended the cluster member is free to mentor another person in a way that they deem appropriate. The same criterion by which initial cluster members were chosen is still applicable. The new person must have a heart for God and to share the Good News with others, even if this is embryonic. To that end they must be teachable and prayerful. This knowledge transfer from the cluster members to congregation members is meant to be more organic, yet within the confines of the trained up cluster. They know what the process has been up to this stage and they are now free to adapt it to the particular circumstances of the new evangelist. It will however be important to keep a regular check on the progress of all members involved in this, so several meetings to debrief and encourage would be necessary.

Task Group Set Up to Facilitate Community Festival

The street party itself is a large undertaking. In the past a staff member has overseen this. This person's assignment is to facilitate the whole of the event from the broader details to the micro. The event is divided into three areas: front of house (stage, music, performers, puppets and MC), stalls and amusements (craft stalls, bouncy castle, games, etc) and food (including the cafe, BBQ, etc). For each of these areas it is important to form a team that has an overseer. The task group needs to begin meeting in May in order to book things like the road closure, any guest artists performing, and liaise

with the city council. The staff member responsible for the event will, with the help of the staff team, recruit the participants in the task group.

Debrief of Whole Church on Event

Because the street party is in the first week of December it runs afoul of the busiest time of the year. This is particularly true when trying to debrief the street party and even more so when trying to ascertain information about evangelistic results. The best way to debrief is immediately after the street party. Often this is a time when people are tired but still looking to talk about the experiences they just encountered. It would be wise to include a debrief time in all the in-house advertising so that people were prepared for the time it would take. For the cluster it would be best to schedule a time in the immediate week after the street party to discuss the outcomes of any conversations they might have had and to arrange any follow up for non-Christians.

Debriefing serves a dual purpose. It enables learned lessons to be considered and acted upon. This is important for the ongoing viability of the street party and also as an opportunity to share faith with the community at large. The natural questions are: what things could have we done better to facilitate conversations about faith; were there any obvious blockers that could be removed next year to further encourage faith engagement; what were the successful things that helped people engage in a conversation about faith? These questions give good clues as to what more could be done for future evangelistic flavoured events. The second purpose for debriefing is to hear the stories of how God has used the event to further the Kingdom and to point out where the Spirit has been moving. These stories bring a great deal of encouragement to the church. If one good news story is

told to a reasonable-sized group then it quickly spreads to the whole church. Indeed one good news story is enough to validate all the effort gone into the cluster- those mentored, the sermons, Bible studies, testimonies and circulated literature. Stories of God at work in the present company are revitalising to a church community and spur on further efforts.

Resources

To ensure smooth running of the strategy several key resources must be in place. The first is to ensure that the cluster has a regular place to meet. This would be a room that is undisturbed and in a quiet location. It is difficult to pray and discern in a noisy atmosphere. The room should also have a table or several tables so that notes can easily be taken and books, Bibles and other essentials all within reach. The purchasing of the resource manual for the cluster, *Holy Conversations*, could easily happen online with plenty of time for it to be on hand for the group. It is easy to do a biblical study as well, as each member will already have a Bible. The group might also be interested in some of the literature being disseminated among the congregation so extra copies would be put aside for the cluster. When it comes time for the cluster to mentor another they could simply take what they believe to be appropriate to share.

The Bible study material could be based on the sermons. If this was so, questions could easily be written to fit with the sermon and posted on the Malvern Uniting App. The workbook from Peace could be made available for groups to work through. This is easily disseminated by the church office and existing home group structures.

The sermons for the evangelism series would be slotted in as part of the normal preaching plan for the year. The order of services would be formed around the theme of

evangelism. There are many songs that would reinforce the theme, both congregational songs and performance pieces. People would be invited to participate with a testimony or be part of an interview in a worship service.

There are budgeting implications of a community event like the street party. In the past the event has run at a slight loss, but the church was willing to absorb that as a missional and service contribution to the suburb. However, this is a discussion that needs to be had at the Church Council level and one that involves the Malvern Treasurer. The ingoing and outgoing costs are close to the \$5,000 mark so the street party team needs to keep a close eye on the expenditure of the event. Further, the resources for the cluster need to be financed through the church budget as well, even though in the grand scheme the workbooks are quite inexpensive.

Additional support

The logistical planning for the street party is quite large. There are many things that need to be considered to make it successful as the event draws near. Risk management plans need to be worked on and approved by Malvern Church Council along with insurance issues and cover. The local City Council requires a risk management plan and application to block the street, plus \$800. It also means liaising with a traffic management group to handle the street closure. The one retirement village needs to be consulted on their driveway access as do a few dozen residents who will be inconvenienced. The booking of vendors and other miscellaneous providers has to take place early in the year. Nearer to the time, church volunteers are recruited, supplies purchased, amusement equipment is checked and advertising goes out. On the day the

volunteers are briefed, the set up team goes into action, the event happens and the pack down team takes care of the clean up. All these logistical details are taken care of by the team. One stand out feature is that all volunteers are issued with a red t-shirt with the slogan “Ask me” printed on the back and the church logo on the front. This simple slogan is a trigger to invite conversation with the suburb and to ensure that the church is seen in the best possible light, thus engendering trust.

Additional support to making Malvern Church a faith-sharing community is important. This refers to those that are alongside the cluster and individuals being mentored. The Malvern Church Council plays a governance role in the life of the church, but also a leadership role. Its support behind the strategy is important to its longevity. Indeed to implement this plan properly it has to be on the Council’s strategic plan for the life of Malvern Church. Council oversees the street party as a significant community outreach and strives to help the church be effective for the Gospel in the suburb.

Assessment Plan

To understand if the strategy has had any impact it is necessary to review the many months worth of work. Assessment provides critical feedback into how others perceived the project and if, from their perspective, it was worth it. Both those who were involved deeply and those who were more on the outside will be invited to give feedback.

Creation of Online Questionnaire for Cluster

Time is critical for quality feedback. Being so close to Christmas it is important to not let the assessment become swallowed up in the festive season. If the assessment was

left until January some memory lag would have taken place and details would be lost. To ensure the fastest way to get fresh feedback this project will use an online tool called Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey is a free web-based analysis instrument that can be programmed to ask a particular set of questions. It can also be used to tabulate results and find trends. It is a quick tool to use for the respondent and one that can easily be disseminated. All it takes is for the church office to send out invitational links to the many email addresses on the church database.

Cluster and Key Leader Post-festival Questionnaire

Alongside of a more general congregational questionnaire it would be useful to have a particular set of questions for those involved at a deep level. While this could be also done with the Survey Monkey tool, better feedback would be gained from a different style of questionnaire. This would be most helpful if it was in fact, a pre- and post-set of questions. Questions like: what difference have you noticed to how you approach conversations with non-Christians; what was most helpful in mentoring on evangelism; what is the best way you have found to start a conversation with a non-Christian; in the last six months how many faith conversations have you had with non-Christians, would all prove helpful to understanding the success of the strategy. These answers and others would inform the forming of a new cluster group in 2016 and the repeat of the strategy in moving towards a community festival.

Personal Witness: Significant Conversation Reports

Online surveys cannot capture the personal story behind statistics. These stories have to be gathered on a one-to-one basis and will take some time to find. However a public appeal from the pulpit and a notice to the same effect in the newsletter and App could hurry the process up. These stories about faith-filled conversations or reports of someone making steps toward becoming a follower of Jesus need to be written down and circulated with the other debriefing data.

Personal Observation: Perceived Culture Change at Malvern Uniting

The whole point of the project is that Malvern Uniting develops into a faith-sharing community. This can be measured by personal observation. It can be seen in the way people act out their faith. It can be seen when people begin to awaken to the fact that God has a plan for the Church, and they can play their part. They begin to witness to their friends and family and people come to know Jesus. It is measured by how much people talk about the conversations with non-Christians they have had. It is also seen in a desire for prayer for those who do not yet know Jesus and by invitations to church related events whereby non-Christians can be introduced to Christians. These are all very subjective and *ad hoc* ways to survey the response to this project but these are the outcomes most needed in the life of any church, not least of all being Malvern Uniting Church.

Report on Results

When all the surveys are in and the cluster has been debriefed the report can be finalised. The report will tabulate as much of the results as possible and will be presented

to the Malvern Church Council, the staff, and to the original cluster group. It will contain the strengths of the project as well as the weaknesses. It will detail lessons learned and growth areas to be worked on for the 2016 project. A brief version of the report will also be made available to the whole church for comment, reflection and encouragement.

Conclusion

Implementing a process of evangelism in a traditional church is no mere feat. There are many things that need to be worked on and details to be thought through. Yet, through the detail and activity one thing must remain firmly in the centre of the target: Malvern Church is attempting a community event so that members of the suburb of Malvern might have a chance to experience the church and in doing so be introduced to Jesus. This is not something that Malvern wants to do once and then forget about, but for it to be an ordinary part of a traditional church's life. The timeline, assessment and leadership development are all tools for the purpose of this goal.

CONCLUSION

The River Murray is more than just an icon of Australia. It is life for this big, brown-parched land. From its waters comes all that is needed for thousands of kilometres of land to exist. Humanity would not have survived without its life-providing sustenance. It provides life for many. It is dangerous though, it is unpredictable, changing and fraught with hazards. Its waters teem with birds and insects and, above all, fish. It has lots of fish, but not so the billabong. Created by a change in the river's course the billabong has stagnant water and, apart from the very odd flood or sparse rain, has little inflow. It is however very safe and predictable. The billabong has little to no fish.

Malvern Uniting Church with its long history in the suburb of Malvern is on a journey from the billabong to river, from safety to risk, from in-house to out on the street. Malvern Uniting is the classic institutional church. It has stood as a bastion of faith for over a hundred years. It values preaching and music as an important expression of faith. Many members are affluent professionals who value faith yet have a spiritual poverty. For the church, tradition and comfort are overriding values that have a subversive way of setting culture. Nice Christianity threatens to dominate as the overarching theme.

Yet, for all the negatives, the church has made some quality attempts to engage the wider community. Efforts are underway through various outreach programs to share the Gospel and connect with the suburb. Through children's programs, trust is earned and the church is reclaiming its place as an important factor back into the community. Growth is happening, but there is more to be done and many more opportunities to be taken.

The suburb of Malvern is a well-to-do, middle-class suburb that is made up of time-poor professionals. Many have been educated in church-based schools that have vaccinated them against the Gospel. On the surface it appears the suburb has it all together. Yet the display of wealth and the blue stone homes screen other issues under the surface. Lack of trust is apparent, loneliness is on the upsurge, the size of fences is ever increasing and household security systems are common. Malvern has no safe place for community gatherings.

The Great Commission gives the church the responsibility to be a faith-sharing community. Theologians through the ages have affirmed this understanding. As a church under the Lordship of Christ, Malvern Church has a mission responsibility as well. Alongside worship and discipleship, mission is one of the key functions of the church. While the wider Uniting Church views mission in broad terms, mission without sharing faith is inadequate. The task of faith sharing rests with every member of the Body of Christ. Without evangelists the reproduction system of the body is impotent. But it has to be done in a way that is sympathetic with the context of the hearer.

Jesus, Peter and Paul all show from a biblical perspective how faith sharing can happen when a person is sensitive to the needs of the hearers and open to the work of the Spirit. The church has these records not just as interesting stories, but as examples of how evangelism can take place in different contexts and with a wide audience. The Spirit enables the church to do this in its own location and in the present time.

Malvern Church can make a difference to the suburb it lives in. To do that it needs a change of culture from that of comfort and tradition to one that is determined to

share faith. Evangelism though has been seen as a professional's job and not one for every member to participate in. This thinking needs to be debunked and replaced with a fully biblical understanding of faith sharing and conversion. Evangelism in the modern era happens not as a one-off event in a big gathering but more often as a process with a trusted friend.

While not everyone is ready to embrace a renewed emphasis on evangelism, some would be. In a similar model of how Jesus mentored the twelve disciples, a cluster group of six is formed to start this culture change. In fact the outcome of their mentoring is a climate change in the church. Individuals and small groups of people have often been used by God to renew the church and bring about significant change. The leadership of this group forces the church to take notice of evangelism and attracts other individuals to the cause. Culture change begins.

Listening to the culture of the suburb of Malvern highlights that the church has a real opportunity to engage with the community. Creating a safe community place is a contextually sensitive and culturally appropriate way for the church to relate. At this event trust is earned and the possibility of faith sharing by the church to the community has increased exponentially. By listening to the Spirit cluster members have the ability to share faith in a way a non-Christian can perceive and hear.

The outcome for the church is that a new culture is started and begins to influence the whole congregation. Cluster members become evangelists for evangelism. Success breeds success and good news stories of changed lives travel fast. Transformation takes place in front of people's eyes. Malvern begins to realise God's call to join the Spirit on

mission is a task they can participate in. Indeed they are equipped and have the necessary tools for the undertaking if only they would take time to prepare.

The outcome for the suburb is a revitalized church that cares and prays and is sensitive towards their needs. The church begins to alleviate systemic problems of loneliness, trust and community space. Far from being a place to visit on Christmas and Easter and an old symbol of a bygone era, the church offers the suburb life: spiritual and community life. It gives the neighborhood the chance to come out from behind high walls and locked fences and to partake in real community. Most importantly it gives an opportunity to hear the Gospel in a way that can be understood.

Any culture change strategy needs to be sustained in order for it to have a long-term effect. To continue to reach beyond the walls of the church and share faith requires an unrelenting and long-term commitment to the cause. For Malvern Church this means the cluster must influence the street party and evangelism has to be repeated. Taking into consideration the feedback and listening to the voice of the Spirit the strategy must be repeated in 2016. Maybe it would be possible to run several cluster groups, thus widening the impact. Maybe also the mentoring could be done in time for a Children's Carnival. The options for this simple strategy are unlimited.

For the Australian church and the Uniting Church in particular, evangelism has been placed in the too-hard basket. Much of this is seen displayed at Malvern Uniting. What is most particular is most universal. If the wider church was to really understand that faith sharing comes not as a one-off event, nor done by professionals but, over a period and by anyone in the Body of Christ then a revolution could take place, a

revolution of releasing the body and sharing faith. Again as in many things it needs to be placed carefully in a new location. Context is everything and it must be adapted to suit the time, the place and the people to whom we hope to reach.

The billabong is safe, very safe and easily predictable. But there is no sustaining life to be found in its waters. In contrast is the Murray River, a vast body of water. Yes, the Murray is dangerous. It is also unpredictable and changing and evolving. But it also teems with life, with microcosms, with fish. The river is where life is at. To live, the church has to be on its banks.

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