

REGIONAL GATHERING - A Scottish network for those passionate about mission and evangelism.

Tues. 27th Oct 09 Dunblane.

The event was hosted by Derrick Norton from the Connexional Team London. The aim was to explore and share ideas from local initiatives across the District. Three separate speakers were introduced with time for small group discussion after each speaker. Our speakers of local initiatives were Revd. Geoffrey Baines, Revd. Andrew Renshaw, and David Rogerson Co-ordinator, District Evangelism and Resourcing Mission Unit, each addressing being missional from a completely different angle.

Geoffrey explained :-

'We are forces of nature, each to live out our God given purpose or responsibility.'

It is rooted in 'not what we do - but in what we ARE.' 'God's story being worked out through our lives, and our lives in God's story today.
It is about our lives becoming a missional and relational story.

Geoffrey works with Christ- centred and none Christ- centred people - "within" and "without" the church.

He looks at and recognises the strengths, gifts and dreams in others. And, along with the things they are passionate about and enjoy doing, encourages them creatively to use these for the purpose of God, and to become who God created them to be. (*for me the word 'flourish' came to mind*). In so doing we are alive as God intended. Geoffrey expanded the initiative further and illustrated some of the concepts where folk now truly realised the direction and creative space for their energy, strength and love where best to work for God in the community. - To offer who we are, and what we are to others.

Geoffrey asked us to consider two questions;

How does this way of looking at 'missional beings' open or close avenues? (*my thought was the restraint of church structure!*).

How does thinking about life as a story within God's greater story help you to connect with people and God?

Beyond this event Geoffrey offers to walk with any who might wish to explore this - becoming part of God's missional and relational story.

Andrew - experiences at Peterhead church.

Peterhead is a thriving growing church. Andrew said there were several factors that had contributed to this and acknowledged the work of previous ministers since 1970, the influence from Holy Bush and the Toronto Blessing, together with the huge culture of Christian churches in the area, although much of that is Bretheran who keep themselves separate from the main stream churches.

Andrew is influenced by Jeremiah 8:20, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." (Does this mean we had the opportunity and the time to reap but did nothing? It is a potent warning.)

He got together the church leaders and evolved a **Strategy:-**

Andrew advocates and expects "**every member ministry**" in his church.

The **house groups** are an essential part, they have thirteen, and aim to start one new group each year. They each have a leader and deputy. It is in the house groups where a lot of the pastoral care takes place.

They appointed a **Youth Worker** whom they rely on to build things up and oversee some 350 youth, his remit is;

- Youth activities
- Youth Alpha
- Youth Bible study - discipleship
- Equipping & encouraging of the young.

They created a **Leadership Team**.

Growth points:- Build relationships through;

- Ten streets for Christmas, evangelism.
- Alpha (and that's ongoing, encouraging and expecting new folk to take on the next groups)
- House of PRAYER. 2 prayer meetings a week. **mirrored by leadership.**
- Two new house groups
- Back to Church Sunday, they go out in twos around the houses and invite people.
- *Worship / on one occasion stopped music for 3 months, took a risk to stop arguments.*
- Affirmation and Gifts - encouragement /Wagner Staff? an approach or programme?

Andrew explained that "**People need a VISION to bite into and then they are willing to support it**".

- Focused Preaching -where possible 10 out of 13 Sundays- themed and to develop relationships.
- Prayer - Leadership & Congregational
- Strong Leadership Team
- Every member ministry
- Church FAMILY

.....Build and share the vision with Church Council. Church Council also to share in the leadership*.

It's important to lay the foundation with house groups and Bible study to enable folk to grow in confidence in their faith.

Andrew asks is there an openness to new ideas in your church for building relationships?

Andrew goes fishing on the river 6:00am with others, an opportunity to talk, build relationships, and share faith stories.

'Bring a Friend Service', is another initiative where members INVITE PERSONALLY a friend to church. This service is the lowest common presentation of the gospel along with food, - this is following Jesus example of sharing the message over a meal.

Although the vision and strategy were now in place Andrew said we must be aware that " in a growing church there is: **conflict; confusion; and chaos**. You just have to learn to work through these with your leadership team and **take a risk** with what feels right and it if doesn't work, **learn** " and look at another avenue. Andrew said with arguments over the style of music, he ended up banning all music for 3 months, and now everyone is flexible and accepting of others preferences, giving space to different music expression.

David - gave us a proposal for an a` la carte approach to evangelism.

He tabled a menu/package for a more liberal approach to evangelism, where people find it difficult to comprehend many of the Christian concepts, eg. salvation and atonement. Asking. 'Are we adopting the right approach?' He gave us an example, which in effect was a 'cold call', where he and another recently spoke about the gospel at an open celebration held at the Street Cross in Aberdeen. David's address was Wesleyan and he hoped persuasive so everyone would listen with respect. His friend, Ken Morgan, started his talk far more boldly and animated. Shouting out ' Give us a J, give us a E, give us a S, .. etc'. However, neither approach generated much interest from the passers by. Only a man from the pub who had a few to drink shouted back some rough comments. David said he did speak to the man who duly went back to the pub and the group went back to the Salvation Army. On reflection David said it was a lost opportunity they all should have gone to the pub.

David agreed there was a communication problem with church language. People now have no church background and little or no understanding of words such as sin, grace or salvation. Plus cultural prejudices and views of the church often appear a stumbling block. So David compared the standard model of approach to evangelism and an alternative A la Carte approach, giving two possible models for proclaiming the gospel, along with bullet points for exploring faith. He suggested we 'suffer inertia when we don't know which paradigm we fit into, and that our churches and circuits have to choose between table d'Hote and a` la carte menus.'

	Table D'Hote= set menu	A la Carte= you choose
Motivation	Without believing in Christ they will not be saved.	It means a lot to me; it might be equally inspiring to them.
Approach	Tell them they need to repent & believe.	Invite them to share ideas on matters of faith.
Link to	Seekers need separate	We all need much the same

Worship	treatment from believers	thing - spiritual exploration.
Key verses	John 3:16, John 14:6	John 10:10, John 16:13
Sales Model	Direct selling; cold calling persuasion marketing	Consultative selling; relationship marketing

Exploring Faith - a proposal for an a` la carte approach to evangelism

- Open discussion - no person's view takes precedence
- Participation - everyone is encouraged to speak, none has to
- Resourcing - each session to be built around a series of short quotes (taken from Bible, faith books, church statements, sceptics)
- Location - meeting in a pub or coffee shop
- Timing - blocks of, say, 8 sessions each around 1.5 hours. Meet on a regular basis(e.g. weekly or fortnightly).
- Flyers for the course to be prepared: publicity in the pub/coffee shop and local press. Mention of Methodist Church should be minimal (e.g. mentioned as a sponsor) but should include reference to the local church.
- Trial run in one of our circuits; after any necessary modifications could offer it generally.

Main Group Discussion

The main group's discussion after David's presentation centred around, issues of discipleship, and valid message, with the need use appropriate language for today's culture. There was concern that the 'Al a carte' alternative did not portray the true message of Christ, however Derrick Norton did express an interest in it. David agreed with Geoffrey's view that there is a need to share our story and our experiences of God.

My own reflection on the event.

The work Andrew is doing in Peterhead is very encouraging and positive, with pointers for everyone. David maintained local evangelism will only be successful if we feel passionate about the message and the medium. Geoffrey's approach is completely different, for us to become 'missional beings' and from a personal view point I am happy to incorporate this avenue of thinking in the things that I do. All three approaches to evangelism picked up the element of building relationships and being relational; to one another, to others, in community and most importantly to God becoming part of His story and purpose. Surely this is as it should be reflecting the relationship of God - Father, Son and Spirit, acting and working as One.

Derrick Norton gave his appreciation of all the evenings input and added **notices** about what was happening down south.

Mission 21. A gathering for church planters and planners, Bath 17-19 November 2009.

Methodist Cell UK Conference, 'Celebrate!' 9-10 Feb 2010, Northampton. (At this both Martin Bethal and myself spoke up saying we had been down south for such a conference and it wasn't worth us going again to cover the same ground but it was important to get this training available to others **here** in Scotland. Derrick will now

discuss this further with Helen Wareing our National Learning and Development Officer and Graham Horsley at the Connexion. I was also able to advise that both Lawrence Singlehurst and Trevor Withers of Cell UK have expressed that they would be very willing and happy to come and give Cell training in Scotland.)

Fresh Expressions are targeting the 20-35 age group having set up a working party.

There is a FAITH SHARING, with a Methodist Label, 4 sessions, being piloted by Graham Horsley, covering evangelism, discipleship and spirituality. (Helen asked if there was any way we could be part of the pilot? Derrick will find out.)

Venture Fx is a pioneering scheme being rolled out by Rev. Ian Bell, to pioneer new leaders, 20 across the Connexion. (Helen again asked how do we apply to get on the scheme. Apparently you have to apply to Rev. Ian Bell direct.)

The theme of Discipleship is also being rolled out by Martyn Atkins. (It seems there is overlap in some of the things that are happening).

The evening ended with a time to pray for each other and worship.

Report by Angela Dobbins, Lay Worker, Paisley Methodist Church.