

Evangelism and the Post- Christian Culture

- It is my hope that his document will assist you in believing that Evangelism is not only important but is absolutely necessary- That you will be an Advocate of this ministry and by engaging in the blueprint you will have a better understanding of how to proceed and will have the tools to do so, know how to use them and know where to find support if you do not.
- To begin with I want to talk about the church in this Post-Christian culture. I think we would all agree that we know we are facing great challenges. Many words beginning with 'Post' have been featured in writings about the church over the last number of year:
Post- Evangelical, Post-Liberal, Post Modern, Post Christendom – to name a few.
- Sometimes dismissed as trendy, this terminology at least indicates a significant mood within our culture. Often the meaning is unclear. Post Liberal means after and denotes change rather than indicating much about any future direction. We live in an era of flux where past certainties are being questioned, past structure overturned and past answers re-examined.
- There is no way yet to know how much will survive from what has been familiar, or what will disappear. There are in this time more questions than answers at present.
- For the Church this is a time of both challenge and opportunity Loren Mead founder of the A.I. Wrote in his book "Once and Future Church":

"We are at the front edge of the greatest transformation of the Church that has occurred in 1600 years. It is by far the greatest challenge that the Churches of North America have experienced; it may eventually make the reformation of the 16th century look like a ripple in a pond."

- So the Post – Christendom world: we are not in the main stream.
- Less or little influence
- On the margins of society eg. Apostolic Era of early Church
- Treated with distain often suspicion

So where are we at start of the 3rd millennium?

Despite exciting but sporadic signs of growth, some creative initiatives and much talk of revival, our church has continued to decline and age.

- I am also tired of all the bad news over the past years or so. - in the media reports
- The Anglican Church under siege
- Residential Schools, Same Sex Union Debate
- Declining membership
- The 2061 Sound Bite of the last Anglican leaving in 2061

Most mainline denominations are experiencing the same thing. There are churches of all kinds closing across our nation- and this trend will continue.

However not only is there numerical decline, but many churches, including some large and growing congregations, are increasingly distant from contemporary society.

e.g. Connie DenBok – Thumb Generation/ Index Finger Generation. People over 40 dial with their index finger; under 40 with their thumbs. We need to learn to communicate with the under 40's

- Spirituality – in diverse shapes and forms – is back in vogue. Reg Bibby – almost 80% of Canadians call themselves spiritual. Yet less than 12% attend church with any regularity.
- There is a major disconnect!
Most churches are struggling to connect with this reality.
- In respect to the Church I love, we tend to believe “We have it!”, “Everyone else doesn’t and one day they will wake up and realize that!”

- A little arrogant don't you think?!
- The complaint from the youth culture is no longer that the Church is boring but that it is not spiritual enough!, not relevant to their lives.
Nor often does it seem greatly concerned about social justice and the flourishing of human communities and human rights.
- There are wonderful exceptions of course but too many are simply not engaging with contemporary culture or social issues. Not surprising, the prevailing attitude towards church is not hostility, but indifference.

Furthermore, many churches are failing to provide even their own members with a meaningful experience of community, opportunity to encounter God or resources for daily discipleship. Meeting, programs, committees with 'Church-Centric', Teaching & preaching just serve to exhaust the faithful and do little to equip Christians to live out their faith in a changing society. Large numbers of our most committed members are leaving our churches, including many leaders- (last fall I heard from a number of them) Why? Words that were used:

Irrelevance, Not Listening, Concerning more with survival, introversion, narrow mindedness over commitment, patronizing, absorption with trivial issues, confusion of Gospel & culture and many other reasons.

- What was clearly evident amongst these people- although at some level they had given up – as they all remained passionate about our Church. They felt that there was still hope if our church began to listen and begin to respond. What follows today is set against the background of our changing culture and a church in a time of transition. – And in some places crisis!
- We must remember the Chinese symbols for Crisis are
Danger and Opportunity

- Jesus created crisis and He offered opportunity – he shook up the status quo. There was a crisis in that land. Jesus offered a new way to live in the face of crisis.
- We will not attempt to solve all the problems that are confronting us – we will not offer a silver bullet.
- As I have traveled around our diocese and beyond there are those who;
 1. Do not see a problem – things seem fine and they carry on as they always have.
 2. Know things have changed – are experiencing steps and challenges
 - Are uncertain how to proceed?
 - Circle the wagons, continue to work harder, harder
 - Pasta form of ministry
 - Little effect
 3. Recognize the changes and needing to respond.
 - It means taking risks
 - It means letting go
 - It means trusting the Holy Spirit
- What I hope the out come of this day will be:
 1. That we are aware of the challenges
 2. That you believe evangelism and it's components to be a critical direction we must take
 3. That you feel you have the framework, the tools and support to do it.