

Being Christ-centred and Community-facing



Three Studies for
Congregations on
the Theme of the
General Assembly
2006

Prepared by
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Moderator Designate

Introduction

Greetings to all of you about to begin this series of Bible studies. I have written them so that the whole church (of which you are a part) may participate in the work of the General Assembly 2006.

These studies are about congregational life and mission. I am asking that the leadership of your church be involved. My hope is that through participating in them, your commissioner (Clergy or Elder) as they prepare themselves to enter into the dialogues and discussions of the Assembly will be able to hear and take on board your faith community's contribution.

However, we're not going to talk about the specific issues or the decisions to be made at this Assembly. Conversation about that material has by now already begun in your Presbytery and Parish Council/Session. Rather these studies help define a forward-looking context in which to make those decisions as the whole church. We are a church in mission - our context for that mission must be the local community. God is calling us to be "Christ-Centred and Community-facing," a theme that will be picked up in our worship and teaching and by our keynote speakers at Assembly, a theme you are invited to explore in these studies.

The study has three parts: the first picks up the work of Garry Marquand, our current Moderator, and encourages us to be aware of the current mission context in which we find ourselves. The second looks at the way of Jesus, of going beyond the bounds of our own comfort to love our neighbours, and the third asks each congregation to review its church's engagement with the local community and prepare a poster to tell Assembly about it.

I hope you enjoy the studies. May they help your congregation discern what the Spirit is saying to our Church.

Pamela.

Pamela Tankersley

Moderator Designate

How to use this study:

I have put it together on the understanding that each group will be between 6 and 15 people. I have not included instructions on how to set up the group, because each congregation will already have a system that works for it. It is helpful to let people have copies to read before the first meeting. (You are encouraged to photocopy sufficient for each person. If you wish, hard copies can be mailed to you from the Assembly Office. Contact Trina Lake on phone 04 801 600.)

When trialling it, we found that 1½ hours was sufficient. We read the text and the Bible readings out loud and held most of the discussions with the whole group unless otherwise indicated. You will need newsprint and pens for some discussion and activities, and poster material for the last study.

Please begin each meeting with a prayer. You may like to use the following responsive prayer:

The God of heaven has made his home on earth
Christ dwells among us and is one with us

Highest in all creation, he lives among the least
He journeys with the rejected and welcomes the weary.

Come now, all who thirst
and drink the water of life

Come now all who hunger
and be filled with good things

Come now all who seek
and be warmed by the fire of love.
Amen¹

¹ Iona Community Worship Book, p 26

Study 1. Mission in Transition - A Future with Hope

There is no doubt that the church in which many of us grew up was a very different church from today. One of many changes to our way of being church in New Zealand queries how "Christian" is the context in which we live. Once almost everyone belonged to church, and it was assumed that everyone was more or less Christian and knew about Jesus and his way. Now we recognise that our churches are islands of faith in a vast sea of secularity.

Some writers have suggested that this new age can be regarded as a new mission era. They suggest that in the Apostolic Age (the first 300 or so years after Jesus) the church was similarly small islands of faith in a hostile sea. In that time the mission frontier, that place where mission began, was the boundary of the local faith community. In his book *The Once and Future Church*, Loren Mead says

"Much of the congregation's life was defined by its sense of being on the mission frontier to a hostile world. But it also perceived that the meaning of its life was to build up its members with the courage, strength and skill to communicate God's good news within that hostile world. Its internal task was to order its life, to establish roles and relationships that nurtured the members of the congregation in the mission that involved each member. Members perceived that the power to engage in that mission - the crossing of the missionary boundary - came from the Holy Spirit."²

But when Constantine in the 4th century CE was converted to Christianity, a new era was begun - the Christendom Era. Now the surrounding context was no longer hostile, for the church became identified with the state. This era more or less persisted until the 20th century. In it, the frontier for mission began where the state ended, and mission became a matter of sending missionaries far beyond the local faith community's shores, far beyond the world of the local Christian. The ultimate in this was the great Empires of the last century, a colonial era where we, even in little New Zealand, sent missionaries overseas to "pagan" lands.

² Loren B Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, Alban Institute, 1993, USA, p12

However Loren Mead also states:

"Because the empire was by definition identical with the church, and because only the world outside the Empire was seen as a pagan environment, mission moved far away. Because the missionary frontier became the same as the empire's frontier, to be a citizen was to be a churchman. The local congregation, previously characterised by high commitment and training in the faith, now became a geographic region within which institutions of society and government were assumed to support the faith and religious institutions were enlisted in the aims of society and government. In the end, mission became the responsibility of the professional."³

But now we can no longer assume that everyone is 'Christian': the "world," the nation, has a separate identity from the church, especially in a secular country like New Zealand. Many in the geographic area around our local church have little interest in the church's activities or beliefs. We are moving into a new era, whose outlines are not yet clear. However a return to one feature of the apostolic age is evident: the frontier for mission is once again at the door of the church.

Discussion Question:

Form into small groups with a mix of older and younger generations in each group.

- 1. What do the different generations see in your local community that would confirm this analysis of the passing of Christendom and an emerging new era of missionary challenge?*

Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

A metaphor that might give us insight and hope in this new era is **the Exile** as we find it described in the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. In this Bible Study we turn to a prophet of the exile, Jeremiah. Our passage for study is Jeremiah 29:4-14. Please read it together.⁴

³ *ibid*, p28

⁴ English texts translate the Hebrew word *Shalom* as *peace*, or *welfare*. Most scholars comment that this does not convey well the richness of the concept. It means *peace* and

Exile happened for Judah and Israel in the 7th and 6th century BCE. In 722, Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, and in 587 Jerusalem of Judea fell to the Babylonians. As a powerful political control measure, it seems the significant people - the leaders (both civil and religious), the artisans, the community builders - were physically deported to Babylon as slaves, leaving a remnant of the least influential, "the vinedressers and tillers of the soil" in the city of Jerusalem and its surrounds.

A perusal of the prophetic texts such as Isaiah and Jeremiah suggests the prophets viewed this catastrophe not so much as the result of Babylonian evil but as a consequence of breaking the Covenant and of disobedience to the Torah (Mosaic Law) by God's people. This caused God huge sorrow and distress: Solomon and his successors had built an empire that disregarded those on the margins of society. With such an elitist attitude, "God and his temple have become part of the landscape in which the sovereignty of God is fully subordinated to the purpose of the King."⁵ God's power is effectively appropriated by the Kings and Priests. In these prophetic texts, we repeatedly hear rejection of this royal theology and a call for a return to the covenant ways of God.

So, Jerusalem falls. The result is a loss of land, of community, of leadership, of wellbeing and most importantly a loss of what we would call faith. The temple is utterly destroyed in 587 BCE and with it the centre of religion and all that gives meaning to existence. Israelites are deported to Babylon as exiles. Now they sit in exile: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"⁶ There is dislocation, grief, hopelessness, confusion and insecurity. In their profound laments, they deny any contribution to their own dilemma; they long for the old days, and exude hopelessness.

The temptation for the Exiles is to lay the blame for their plight on the Babylonians. But in doing this, their life as a community will continue to be framed by their Babylonian captors, they will remain paralysed as victims and unable to respond to God's call.

welfare, and also means *being in harmony with all of creation*. Following Brueggemann, I have chosen to leave the Hebrew word in the English text.

⁵ Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Fortress Press, 1985, p 34

⁶ Psalm 137

What are the survival techniques for this exilic community? There are at least three alternatives:

- isolation and separation - becoming a sect to preserve the Jewish way of life (including worship); a kind of interim survival technique, that leaves the Jews in "victim" mode as they wait for God to rescue them (soon), when their torment will be at an end.
- accommodation /assimilation/adaptation - abrogation of what is important as the covenant people of Israel. This alternative does not anticipate a return to Jerusalem, so denies the covenant relationship with God, leading to a consequent loss of identity and hope.
- denial of the situation, self-righteous non-cooperation; declaring the Babylonians evil and outside God's plan. This kind of elitism is a choice to glorify the past, clinging to tradition and the fading memories of yesteryear.

Discussion questions: First read together Psalm 137:1-6

1. *What do our Christian communities have in common with the exilic community of the 6th century BCE? What is the strange land, the "city of Babylon" for us? What do we lament?*
2. *How has our elitism and the way we have let the sovereignty of God be subordinated to the affairs of the state contributed to our exile?*
3. *Divide into 3 groups and role play a congregation with one of the following stances: What would be the words and phrases you might hear spoken, if you were a member of a congregation that was reacting to "exile" like this?*
 - a) *retreating into isolation as a sect, blaming others for your plight, and expecting God to rescue you.*
 - b) *accommodating and assimilate into the mainstream, giving away your distinctiveness and integrity*
 - c) *denying that there is anything amiss (because the system works for you?)*

Engaging with the Community

But Jeremiah, writing a letter to the exiles from Jerusalem, has another alternative to offer, a subversive and risky alternative.

He says in effect, "None of these alternatives is acceptable: God has **sent** you into this exile, and there is a call on you, even in this place. Here is an opportunity for you. Settle down, marry, plant fields and build homes. You will be there for the long haul and I have a mission for you. I want you to work and pray to God for the wellbeing and peace of this city. As resident aliens, engage with locals, seek the shalom of the city, pray for them; because your wellbeing as God's covenant people will be entwined with and dependent on the welfare and peace of this city. You are to build communities of peace for all."

This is radically different from mere survival, or even accommodation and conformity, and is most certainly not rebellion. Rather, the exiles are to engage with the people of Babylon, at the same time remaining distinctively as the Covenant people. They will discover God is not only to be found in Jerusalem and its temple, but is with them in Babylon. In fact, the God they worship is God of the whole world, including Babylonians! So the possibility for life enhancing joy is present - even in Babylon; they can stand strong and grow, ready for return when God is ready for them. They are to end the lament and become a positive influence for God, loving and praying for their "enemies."

And Jeremiah has more. God says, "Do not listen to the false prophets, who are among you, I did not send them."⁷

What is it that these prophets were saying? What is their analysis of the dilemma? Were they advocating a 'holier than thou' stay at a distance policy, or insisting that God would rescue the people quickly? We need to remember that Jeremiah believed that exile is within God's intention for the Hebrews because they have broken the covenant and been disobedient to the demands of the Torah, particularly those commands to care for the least in their society. But he writes in a powerful way that God will not desert them; they will be restored in God's good time, and not by their efforts or their wishful thinking.

So we come to one of the most endearing passages in Scripture: God says, "For surely I know the plans that I have for you, plans for your shalom, and

⁷ Jeremiah 29:10

not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”⁸ God “had seemed to the exiles to be hidden, absent, unavailable and ineffective,”⁹ but is now available. This is an amazing message of hope in the midst of despair, of light after the darkness of exile, of God’s abiding loving presence through it all. It promises shalom - peace.

So what does this Biblical text hold for us, in our time and context? Let’s explore that with some questions...

Discussion Questions

1. *What might it mean for your congregation to “build houses, develop relationships and plant gardens” in the midst of its “captivity”?*
2. *Where do we see signs in our culture, that God is not only Lord of the church but is Lord of all? In Christian language, what will it mean to join with Christ who is already out there, working in the community?*
3. *What does it mean to engage with the “Babylonians” and pray for them, in our culture? Brainstorm a list of all the ways that your congregation engages with its local community, as a whole and as individuals. (Don’t forget the APW work) You might want to separate these into*
 - a) *community projects initiated and managed by your church,*
 - b) *projects in the community that your church joins in with and*
 - c) *community projects in which individuals in your church participate*

Please keep this list for use in the next two studies!

4. *Where in the community do you see the joy and hope born of the Spirit breaking through because of your mission?*

⁸Jeremiah 29:10

⁹ Breuggemann, Walter, *To Build, To Plant*, Eerdmans/The Hanset Press, 1991, p. 33

Study 2: Being Christ-Centred and Community-Facing

This study looks at why and how following Jesus' way in our time means to be Christ-centred and community facing.

Proclaiming the Good News and Serving with Good Deeds

According to Luke, in the event in Nazareth, that opens his public ministry, Jesus announces his 'manifesto' by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he began to say to them, "This day this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."¹⁰

The Gospels tell us that the whole of Jesus' ministry is filled with preaching the good news of God's forgiveness and God's love for all people. But his ministry is also filled with the manner in which this manifesto takes concrete form. Jesus did not just deal spiritually with the poor, the captives, the oppressed, and the blind. He healed and freed and empowered them. The ultimate parable - the Good Samaritan - lays out exactly what Jesus means by "loving God and loving neighbour." His own ministry of loving service culminates in the act of washing his disciples' feet: "If I your teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash each other's feet."¹¹

In their book *The Externally Focused Church*, Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson pick up this dual emphasis, suggesting that:

"Good works are coupled with good news throughout Scripture. When summing up the ministry of Jesus, Peter simply said: "God... (told) the good news.. through Jesus Christ ...and...he went around doing good...because God was with him."¹² Good news and accompanying good deeds are like the two wings on an airplane. Each is incomplete without the other. Each complements the other. Each gives a lift to the other. To study the life and ministry of Jesus is to study a

¹⁰ Luke 4:32

¹¹ John 13:14

¹² Acts 10:36-38

tapestry woven of good news and good deeds. Woven through the fabric of his life was a ministry of Show and Tell - of good works and good news, side by side, working powerfully together."

Perhaps "showing love" or in our jargon "walking the talk", is the most visible and compelling way of taking Christ to all. Here is the most amazing grace: not that we believe, but that we love!

St Francis apparently told his followers to "preach the good news at all times, if necessary, use words!"

Discussion Question:

1. Consider your relationship in mission with the local community (you may like to refer to the list you made last week) Now on newsprint, draw a grid like the one below. Take at least 3 or 4 of the community engaging mission initiatives you listed in the last study and place them in the table. What does it tell you about the balance of bringing good news and doing good deeds in your outreach?

	<i>Strong ministry of service, on "Doing Good Deeds"</i>	<i>Not much service in this ministry</i>
<i>Strongly focussed on "Preaching the Good News"</i>		
<i>Weak on proclaiming Good News</i>		

We in the Protestant church have strongly emphasised that we are not saved by good works, but by faith alone. Texts from Paul have emphasised this:

"For it is by grace that you are saved through faith -and not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast."

But we have often neglected to read on to verse 10:

"For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do."¹³

Have we looked for salvation (on a personal level) and been unaware of the purpose of our salvation? I am reminded of the words of Jim Wallis (of the Sojourner's Community in Washington DC), "God is personal, but never private"¹⁴ Personal relationship with Jesus can never be an end in itself, but must be a means to the end of being bearers of God's love to all. And who are the "all"? Who is the good news for? Surely those at our front door.

Jesus and the Woman from Syrophenicia

We will look at one of many stories in the Gospels that challenge us to think about salvation as interplay of good news and good deeds.

Read the story together: Matthew 15:21-28.

This is an unplanned incident apparently and the disciples are not pleased with the upset. Their intention is to get Jesus out of the high stress of his public life. The woman is from the region of Tyre and Sidon. She is a Canaanite - she is the wrong religion, the wrong race and the wrong gender to receive the help of a Jewish man and yet she comes crying to this 'Son of David' for his healing power for her daughter. We read that she is making a lot of noise and the disciples' reaction is to demand that Jesus send her away. The insiders will not share their bread with the outsider. Initially, Jesus is silent, yet she does not go away - presumptuously and courageously she keeps on at him, falling at his feet, expecting an answer.

Will Jesus send her away? That is the implication. Almost as if musing to himself, Jesus remarks that the bread of salvation is for the lost sheep of Israel, and it's not fair to give it to the "dogs!" -seemingly harsh language from a man of love.

But she is quick witted and confronts him with his own truth, "Even the dogs get to eat the crumbs under the table!" she replies. We might imagine now there is a silence as all gathered wait to hear what Jesus will say to this

¹³ Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁴ Wallis, Jim, *God's Politics*, Lion, 2005

outrage. Perhaps he laughs? Or perhaps it is at this point in his ministry that Jesus becomes aware of the unlimited nature of God's healing grace, working through him. He commends this woman, this interloper from outside the circle, for her confrontation and her faith and gives her the "bread" she needs - healing for her daughter.

Where do we see our church and our mission in relation to this story? Who is on the fringe of our society, needing "bread?" Are we like the disciples? When noisy outsiders demand Jesus' love, do we tell them to go away, so that we can protect Jesus, and keep the bread for our kind of people or do we commend them for their faith in our God and love them into life?

How often do differences in gender, economics and race enter into our decisions as to whom we help and whom we refuse?

Here is an exercise based on the Bible story to help you consider how your church deals with needy outsiders.

The Villagers and the Picnickers

Once upon a time, in a country a long way from here, there was a village of people called Syro-Phoenicians. One day they all contracted a terrible disease called no-bread-mania, whose only antidote was bread. It was a disease that left them quite unable to help themselves, except that they could wave and shout at whoever would listen, and they did this with great gusto, waving and shouting "give us bread!"

One day several groups of picnickers were in the vicinity of the village - and all the picnickers had bread in abundance. The villagers could see some of them so they shouted and waved furiously.

One lot of picnickers was on the top of a very large hill. These folk were sitting surveying the magnificent view, celebrating how good God is. They saw the villagers waving below and said to each other. "How lovely, they must be admiring how fit and strong we are to have reached the top!" And so they waved back with great friendliness.

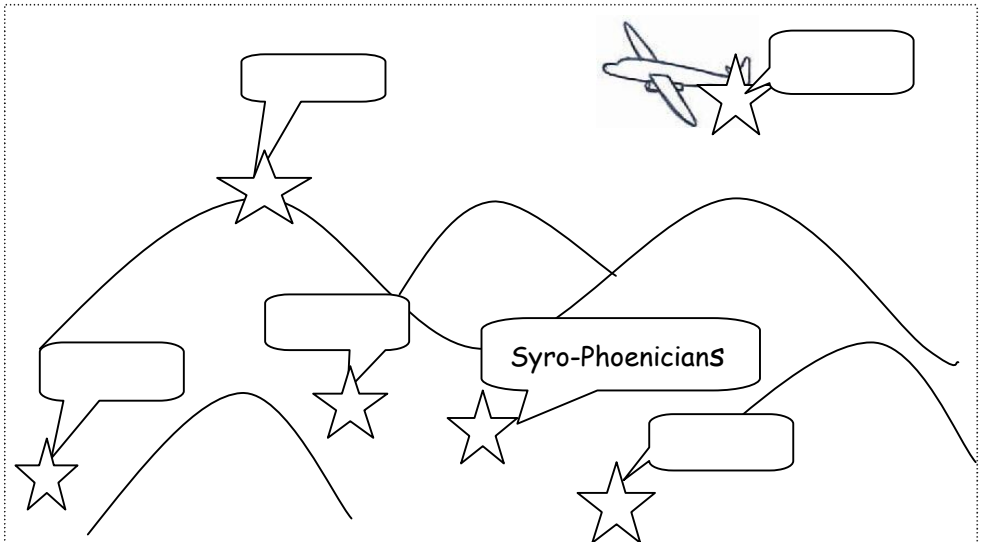
Another lot were on the other side of the hill, enjoying the peace and tranquillity of their own private world. They could neither see nor hear the

villagers so they were not affected by their plight. They said "It is so peaceful here."

A third group were on a plane, high above the village. They did know of the dilemma, but had decided that the best thing they could do was get some professionals in, who really knew about the disease. They were currently on their way to a world conference about its implications and containment. They said to each other, "We will organise some real help. We will leave it to the experts."

The fourth group of picnickers were not so far away. They could hear the shouts and see the waving, but dismissed the villagers saying, "Whatever next? Why don't they buy their own bread?" And "This is nothing to do with us - we don't think we should get involved," and carried on with their own picnic.

The fifth group, who were nearby, heard the cries for bread, saw and understood, and made their way to the villagers. They asked, "What can we do?"



Discussion Questions:

In your group...

- 1. Draw a picture of the "map" on newsprint and mark on it: the village, stick figures to denote each of the groups of picnickers, and speech bubbles with their comments.*
- 2. Decide together what you know to be one of the most pressing concerns/needs in your local community. This is the no-bread-mania!*
- 3. If this 'need' was the villagers without bread, where you would find your church's picnic in relation to the villagers? Talk about this in small groups and then share your findings, and what they tell you about your approach to community mission.*
- 4. Fill in a speech bubble above where your church picnicked with suggestions of action for positive change.*

Study 3: Engaging with our Communities

The aim of this study is to help you look closely at your local mission and to compile enough information for you to write up the story of your church's most significant "community-facing" mission.

But first some thoughts about mission that is Christ-centred and community-facing.

Let's look at another familiar passage of Scripture: Micah 6:1-8. Read it together.

Micah is also a pre-exilic prophet, addressing the same situation as Jeremiah and Isaiah, except that he does so from a rural perspective, rather than from Jerusalem. The passage takes the form of a courtroom trial. The Lord brings a case against the people, and the mountains and hills are the judges. The Israelites are reminded of the Lord's saving actions. The people are asked to explain how they answer to the charge that they have not kept God's commandments.

Micah challenges:

"You ask, 'With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow down before God on high?'"

And the answer is not worship, but

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with our God?"¹⁵

We could interpret the "walking humbly with our God" as all those activities in our churches that constitute our personal journey with God, those things which help us to be "Christ-centred" - our worship, our Bible study and prayer, our mentoring and encouraging of one another.

It's the other two phrases that make up our "community facing" mission: **loving kindness (mercy)** and **acting with justice**.

US writer Harvey Conn defines the distinction between justice and mercy:

"What will be the instrument of the church in effecting change? Not simply charity, but also justice. Charity is episodic, justice is ongoing. One brings consolation, the other brings correction, one aims at symptoms, the other at causes. One changes individuals, the other changes societies."¹⁶

Most of us find it easy to be kind, to serve in love, yet not so easy to be advocates for the poor and marginalised. But there are limits to how much we will change the world for Christ by picking up the casualties in our ambulances at the bottom of the cliff. We need to build those fences at the top as well!

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Go back to the list of community mission projects that your church participates in. How do they rate when considered as 'ambulance' mission or 'fence-building' mission?*
- 2. Which community mission initiatives could be identified as "acting with justice?"*

¹⁵ Micah 6:7-8

¹⁶ Harvey M. Conn *A Clarified Vision For Urban Mission*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987, p147

Community-facing Mission depends on relationships.

How was it for your group, when in the first study, you were asked to draw up a list of the multitude of ways your congregation engages with the community in service? Were you moved to hear some of the stories? Were you surprised to have personal efforts included in your congregation's list? My guess is that overall the projects mentioned will have ranged from the rather passive "we make our buildings available to the community," to very active children's ministries, to high commitment to overseas missionaries. Some groups will not have known where to begin a list of their local community mission, because there appears to be little focus on mission. I ask these folk to look deeper into the relationships each of you has with the community around you. And remember, **we can all pray for our communities.**

For those who are struggling to name their mission, perhaps a consideration of your church's APW mission might be significant?

Mission does not need to be grand to be effective: it needs to reveal God's love. Mother Theresa said. "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

Loving service requires respectful relationships and perhaps the most effective evangelism is done through the friendship of ordinary folk. This is possible for all congregations, big and small.

Wouldn't it be great if we stopped measuring the effectiveness of our church by the number sitting in the pew each Sunday and started considering our relationship with and our impact on the local community for Christ?

Discussion Questions:

3. *How would someone in your local community finish the following sentence?*

"Oh _____, they are the ones who....."

4. *On your list of community mission projects, mark those that establish relationships between your church and your community.*

Here is a story, told to me by friend who was a social worker with the great George McLeod of the Iona Community in Glasgow.

A woman picked up a destitute girl from the streets. She was in a bad way, physically and emotionally abused. It was some weeks of careful nursing before she was brought back to a reasonable state of health. One day, to her surprise the woman was asked by the girl: 'Why didn't you leave me there in the gutter? Why have you done so much for me?'

The social worker took a deep breath -the moment had arrived: "My dear, I did it for Jesus."

The reply? "Oh," said the girl as she turned back to face the wall, "I had rather hoped you did it for me."

Discussion Questions:

5. *What do you imagine might have happened next in the story?*
6. *What is the passion that motivates your congregation's loving service?*

Every church wants to be church that is growing: in worship numbers, in youth brought to relationship with God, in family ministry, in income, in programmes, in status. The temptation is to see mission as a means of growth as well. This is one of the most significant reasons for distrust of the church by the community and voluntary sector. They assume there is a hidden agenda in our community facing programmes: to get people into church. How can we earn their trust again? How can we work in partnership with community groups who share our concerns for compassion and justice? Is it possible that Christ is found in the loving of these groups as well as in the church?

One thing Jesus taught us; we must not use others to fuel our own egos, or that of the church. If we are to engage lovingly with the local community, we must do it unconditionally, with "no strings attached", with a purity of intention: loving Christ-like service.

On the other hand, that very loving means that we will not hold back from "giving account of the hope that is within us."¹⁷ How does your congregation speak of its Biblical mandate for mission? (If it does, of course...) I wonder how it would be if we were all able to identify a Bible text or story that underpins our mission in our local community!

Discussion Questions:

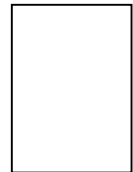
- 7. What would be the Bible text or story that your community treasures as underpinning its Christ-centred, community-facing mission?*
- 8. If you have a mission statement, how does it connect with such mission?*
- 9. What community groups do you (or could you) work in partnership with to accomplish Christ's mission?*

Now to the Poster...

We want every commissioner at the Assembly to bring a bit of their congregation with them - in the form of a poster telling the story of their most significant mission project.

Here are some instructions and some starting points.

We need it to be A2 size (stationary shops sell cardboard this shape): please use it in "portrait" fashion, this way up!



You are welcome to be as creative and colourful as you like! (Photos will be great.) We want them to make a display at the Assembly, and we will keep a record of them, so that I (Pamela) can catch up on your project as I move around the country in the next couple of years.

Your poster should tell us:

1. The title for the Community Mission Project
2. The name of your church and contact details, (for enquiries about your wonderful mission project)

¹⁷ 1 Peter 3:

It might also include some or all of the following:

3. The Biblical phrase that expresses and underpins your mission, and how you see God's spirit encouraging and blessing it.
4. The story of your project:
 - when it began and why, how you identified the needs and how you planned to meet those needs (and how you assess it's impact)
 - who is involved and the way it connects with your congregation
 - what you are trying to achieve (both in meeting needs and in addressing the causes)
 - who it is targeting and how it makes a difference in the community,
 - how it has grown and led to other projects,
 - who your community partners are, how you have funded it (with community grants?)

Conclusion...

Thank you for your participation this study. May your conversations and learning be turned into more effective mission, as we "join Christ who is already out there working in our communities."

As your commissioner heads to Assembly he or she will be better equipped to share your congregation's input and open to hear what else is happening around the country, in our Presbyterian and Uniting Congregations.

Please pray for us as we gather in Auckland, from 28 September to 2 October, 2006. Pray that we may be open to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, that we may make good decisions and that we may be Christ-centred and community-facing in all our work.

I look forward to meeting with you in your Presbytery in the next couple of years.

*Pamela Tankersley
June 2006*

Bibliography

If I was to recommend one book to stimulate your thinking on these matters, it would be "The Externally Facing Church" by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, but here are some of the other books that might be useful.

Walter Breuggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching to the Exiles*, Westminster, 1997.

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