

Blog

An Afternoon of Wrestling

7 May 2008

In editing the notes that Julie took at the wrestle I have tried to make them understandable to someone who wasn't there. This means that I have reorganised the material somewhat, and if I couldn't figure out what a note meant then I eliminated it. My apologies to anyone whose valuable comment ended up on the cutting-room floor. This is, however, an ongoing conversation, so feel free to make your point again! The only agenda for the wrestle was a tentative discussion map that included seven questions, most of which were not dealt with in any detail. We may pick them up again at a later stage.

Steen Olsen

First Question

What constitutes 'church'? What is essential (esse); what may be beneficial (bene esse)? If we were going to start a church among a group of gangsta rappers, what would be essential for it to be a church?

Some individual comments and questions:

- F When describing the Church today we need to speak to the heart rather than head
- F The relationship of being a family and belonging
- F The things that connect people to Christ are essential
- F Church is an expression of the gospel
- F Mission is of the essence of what church is
- F The Church is the body of Christ
- F These are not prescriptive formulae
- F Word & Sacrament – Baptism, Holy Communion
- F How is that Word expressed?
- F How does Jesus express himself through the church?
- F Anything that builds up the body of Christ may be considered *bene esse*
- F Acknowledgement of our sinfulness & Christ as our reconciler
- F Where does the unbeliever fit in the church?
- F Are we closed or open?
- F How do we engage the unbeliever?

- F The Church is people who explore their faith
- F The disciples worshipped & doubted
- F Can we worship & doubt at the same time?
- F Doubt is much closer to faith than to unbelief

- F Not a case of people fitting into the church but rather that we go out to them
- F Movement towards Christ (or him to us)
- F It is both visible (structure) & invisible (body) church
- F How important for the LCA is it that every church has a constitution?

Questions for further discussion:

- F We also need to ask what 'church' is for the unchurched?
- F How helpful are our confessions?
- F Where does the ordained ministry fit in?

Second Question

What theological issues need to be faced if the LCA plants multiplying small incarnational churches in different micro-tribe cultures in our society?

Some individual comments and questions:

- F Are we 'faith planting' or 'church planting'?
- F The wider Institutional church needs to support the local organic church & not the other way round.
- F The 2½ question: How can we help the LCA to understand the organic church? To embrace & support it?
- F Can we recognise a 'self sown' church & nurture it?
- F The big issue is encouraging new initiatives. Our LCA culture is anti this.
- F Initiative for mission comes from the local congregation
- F Leadership – who is able to lead a local church?
- F Emerging communities will baptise, commune
- F The role of Prayer is vital
- F Those who do things differently are perceived as being 'naughty'
- F There needs to be attitudinal change in the Church
- F Fear is a factor and there is a lot of defensiveness
- F The Big Wheel turns very slowly

- F What is the LCA? Is it the wider church & its leadership?
- F How do we understand Synod & how does it operate?
- F The congregation has the power as opposed to the synod.
- F The power of pastor's conferences & decisions made there is an issue
- F Politics is delaying things & hurting a lot of people
- F Deconstruction – do we need to deconstruct who we are as the Lutheran Church?
- F We need to make changes early; the old wineskins will hold us back.
- F The church has given permission (endorsement) for us to be at this place.
- F Just Do It!!
- F "Just Do It" usually results in those who do it severing their connection with us (LCA)

- F Resource the story telling – access those who can write the story, take the photos & share them
- F When you're busy doing the doing, you don't have time for the telling
- F You Tube is a model for us
- F Story telling – share love around a meal etc
- F See new people being disciplined; share stories of people coming to faith

- F The openness among pastors is greater than we may think
- F We should set up a group with clout that can advise, nurture, coach etc those who are involved with emerging communities
- F The existing policies of the Church allow us to do much more than most realise
- F Ability to do this is already there but we don't want to venture down that road easily
- F Pastors with alternative training are not just for emergency situations but also where there are mission opportunities.
- F Lutheran schools are thriving & often bursting at the seams. Few schools have a genuine, dynamic partnership with the local church. We need to start validating experiences that occur outside congregations. New preaching places are not the answer. What's happening in the school is 'church'.
- F Servant leadership seems to be strong, practically in the Lutheran church
- F Communication with existing churches is essential

- F How difficult would it be at present to be involved in, for example, the gay community? What would be the barriers or objections? What if the local pastor doesn't support it?

Closing Reflections – bringing it together

Comments and questions:

Where to from here?

We need to deal with the barriers

We need to let people know what we have been doing today

Are we going to have an abundant harvest or a tidy barn??? We can't have both!

Purpose of planning is to get something done, not just to develop a plan.

We need to support, encourage & embrace those who are doing something

Listen, hear & facilitate

Each person here email to Steen a response to today & pointers on where to from here

Are there initiatives that people here are working on/ thinking about?

We need a forum for telling stories

Have we released our evangelists as a church?

Relationships are the issue rather than principles.

A Little Brain-Storming Scenario to Conclude the Day:

What if Fred, a student at one of our Colleges, is emo and wants to reach out to his emo mates in Rundle Mall. He witnesses to them and they begin to come to faith. A new emo Christian community is born. What potential barriers are there to them being a part of the LCA? What are the relevant principles? What tasks does the Church have in relation to this?

Barriers

Principles

Who is their pastor?

especially in regard to word & sacraments

The role of the pastor is to coach the key community leader
Use cross-cultural missionary models

What is the chain of accountability to the LCA?

One person who has a logical relational connection with the group

Support from local churches:

Should they be part of a city parish?

The issue is not geography

Isolation:

Will they desire to connect with other emo groups?

Should there be an Advocate/Spokesperson?

Mission initiatives person/team
Story-telling team

What is the emo group required to do to relate to the LCA?

Relate to individual(s)

What if they don't want to relate to the LCA?

Let them go but offer support

What if Fred has no supporting pastor to go to?

If we were in China we'd set Fred loose

Other attitudes in the LCA like

"When will they grow up & assume responsibility?"

Church Tasks in regard to such an Outreach:

Identify coaches

Use existing or new PWATs

Gather & Review existing LCA statements: What can we do under current policies?

[end of brain-storm]

Final Comments:**Post Modernism**

- F No final absolute truth
- F Science, Religion up for debate
- F Value systems questioned
- F Human subjectivity is unfixed – you are who you think you are

Theological considerations

- F Knowledge – modern is non committal
- F Climate Change
- F Belief that there is no essential human self
- F Christian apologetics
- F Jesus Christ – crucial, where humankind meets God
- F Holistic
- F Relational

Lionel Otto's Final Words...**Perspectives of the Church:**

- F We Australian Lutherans always have difficulty in regard to change
- F Individuals are not always a community
- F When he was a young pastor he was given the advice: "Don't let your people go to the city – the city is the graveyard of the church"
- F With urbanisation the mission field has come to us
- F In Sydney we have been operating as a rural church in the most densely populated area of Australia
- F The rural mentality still strong in church
- F Crisis – struggling with the understanding that we are the church of the real presence
- F Emerging Church brings a new perspective
- F We need to engage with new ideas rather than just dismiss them

Other Questions that were not specifically discussed:**Third Question**

How would the Church's *DNA* be passed on? [*DNA* = essential core beliefs]

Fourth Question

How would the LCA serve such new churches with an indigenous word and sacrament ministry? [Remember there will be lots of them and they will be small.] How would this ministry be authorised?

Fifth Question

How would such a church relate to the rest of the LCA? Structures? Identity?

Sixth Question

How would accountability operate? Oversight?

Seventh Question

How can we build a resource of understanding and wisdom that is accessible to others?