



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 20/9/20

BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions

Congregational Mission Part 4 - Partnerships

“Make yourselves at home there and work for the country’s welfare. Pray for Babylon’s well-being. If things go well for Babylon, things will go well for you.” Jeremiah 29:7 (The Message)

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Jeremiah 29:7 (NIV)

Partnership with Babylon? Surely not, Lord!

It turns out that God has designed the people of God to be tethered to the world around them. It’s clear from this scripture that if the world around us flourishes, God’s people will share in that flourishing. As the great Baptist preacher declared, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”[\[1\]](#)

In these two versions of Jeremiah 29:7, the words “welfare”, “well-being”, “peace” and “prosperity” are all derived from the one Hebrew word, *Shalom*. This word is so wonderfully spacious it holds all our best God-given hopes for healing, salvation, reconciliation, justice and renewal. There is no better word to describe God’s plans for the whole cosmos. This is the mission of God and partnership is essential.

While we can be grateful that we are not enslaved by the ancient Babylonians, we are still caught up in this network of mutuality and compelled to “seek the shalom of the city.” So, what does this mean for us? How do we flourish through partnership? What does it take for the church to be the people of Shalom in the places where God has sent us?

There are challenges and opportunities to be sure (and we’ll get to those!), but first, good partnership will reflect the ways of God. Here we can briefly identify two of these ways. Without much effort you will recognize them as core to the ministry of Jesus. These characteristics are **intentionality** and **self-sacrifice**.

To be intentional is to properly survey your context and stay alert to what the Spirit of God is up to in your neighbourhood. Just like Jesus, be willing to come alongside unlikely (and even unliked) members of your community if that's what leads to shalom. It's risky to follow Jesus, and fact leads us to....

Self-sacrifice. To be self-sacrificial in partnership is to understand that we will not always own, manage, and control partnership projects nor will we fully agree with those we work alongside. The enslaved Israelites certainly had good reason to find conflict with the Babylonians. Talk about value differences and culture wars...they were in the midst of an actual war! And yet God didn't excuse them from partnership. The call to seek the prosperity of their captives sounds a lot like the words Jesus utters some 600 years later – "love your enemies"[\[2\]](#) New Millennium. Same God.

Challenge

While this biblical example of partnership in the midst of slavery is extreme, our ministries will involve their own difficulties. Invariably we will need to share conversations, projects, and plans with people and organisations that see the world very differently to us. When we think about partnership in this context, we can sometimes fear that we might lose something, like control or ownership of an idea or initiative. This challenge should be held up to the light of God's work not only in the world around us but in our own discipleship journey (as individuals and churches). Might God be inviting us into partnerships to teach us reliance on God's control and provision, not our own? It would be just like God to transform us even as God transforms the world *through* us.

Opportunity

When we read the New Testament, we see that Jesus didn't passively attend events or idly sit by. As he interacted with people, he was actively present not just in saying and doing, but in listening and discerning. How might partnership be an opportunity to really listen to your neighbours, especially those who have no interest in or affiliation with your church? How might partnership be an exercise of discerning what God is up to in our neighbourhoods?

We are called to partner with God in what God is already doing. As we have walked around our neighbourhoods, we see people partnering together, making and sharing masks, helping each other with shopping, bringing joy through Spoonville displays (where families are decorating wooden spoons and creating little villages in the front gardens for neighbours to add to or simply take joy in). We see where community groups are providing care, life's necessities and genuine love to others.

Partnership is at the heart of how God expects us to live out shalom. It is at the intersection of God's people and God's world that we have the opportunity to really encounter the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven."

In conclusion, we leave you with a quote from our Parish Collective friends that reminds us what it means to be the church-for-others:

"Loving without agenda: Often our neighbourhoods are filled with special interest groups. The church is not a special interest group; rather we have a reconciling mission that seeks unity, that all might flourish. Consider how your faith community can champion what others are already doing."[\[3\]](#)

Questions to consider:

1. How can you increase reach into your neighbourhood through partnerships?
2. How can you this week notice and engage in a deeper way with what is already happening in your local community and partner with others to seek the welfare of the city? (look up the homepage of your local council website and identify where their mission and vision overlap and intersect with the values and attributes of the Kingdom of God).
3. Could we accomplish more of our mission objectives if we partnered with others?
4. Would the community benefit if we partnered with another group?
5. How would the Kingdom of God be realised if we entered into a partnership with others?

Blessings,

by Geoff Maddock and Leanne Hill

[1] Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail.

[2] Matthew 5:44

[3] Sparks, Soerens and Friesen - The New Parish