



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 30/8/20

Congregational Mission

Part 1 - Community Engagement

by Rev Gayle Hill and Rev Jono Ingram

"so, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Luke 10:29b

Jono Ingram and I (Gayle Hill) both moved back to Melbourne after living for a significant period in the country and/or regional town. Community and neighbourhood are the essential fabric of life in the country. You cannot go to the local shops without taking another half hour to chat to someone you know. For both of us, relocating to the city revealed challenges as we sought to participate with God in creating the same kind of community engagement (or neighbourliness, because everyone can be a dedicated neighbour), despite people's seemingly independent and indifferent manner. The starting place for this is the following:

1. A passion for God
2. A passion for People
3. A passion for Place (where God has planted you)

It is likely, these three simple but profound areas are marks for all followers of Jesus.

Gayle:

For Warren and I, our inner city neighbourhood of Carlton is a strange mix of people. There are three distinct demographics and none of these integrate, and all but one is reasonably transient. It has the highest number of students (we have three universities within the suburb), young professionals who predominantly rent, and the highest number of people in social housing for an inner urban suburb.

We moved into Carlton ten years ago and have since built developing friendships with neighbours in our street. Paul Sparks¹ describes it as "becoming a known character in your neighbourhood". Sharing meals together, going to the Nova for movies and bike riding and supporting one another when there are issues has become part of the rhythm of our lives, and even deepened during COVID. Warren and I also commenced an intentional work in the social housing precinct just around the corner four years ago. This was a gift from God, and we now have a faith community established with an Afterschool Families program as well as food bank, support etc. We have become "known characters" in this distinct community. I really believe it is a matter of having a prayerful heart and deep love for where God has planted you and following the Spirit's lead.

Jono:

My family's new neighbourhood of Aintree is a growing, multicultural, suburban housing development in Melbourne' north west. It is one of Melbourne's fastest growing communities with many people building their "dream home" and looking for a good neighbourhood to raise their family. It is also probably the most religious place I have ever lived, however the proportion of Christianity in that mix is very low.

Likewise, in Aintree, I have built relationships in the neighbourhood through sporting clubs, running community events & community programs, and inviting new friends over for meals at our home. We have even cut a hole in our fence and installed a gate so our family and our neighbours, particularly our kids, can freely and frequently visit on another. We have discovered that despite having different world views to many of our neighbours, we often yearn for similar things – connection, belonging, acceptance, and a place where we can do things we enjoy alongside others.

Cameron Harder tells the story of coming back to Kolkata in India after twelve months away. The neighbourhood was depressed but it had been transformed in this short period of time. When he asked how this had happened, the answer one woman gave was, "the best thing is that we found each other". Finding "each other" is a spiritual practice because community engagement or neighbourliness is predicated on the Trinity. God's essential character of love, unity and joy in the community of the Godhead (the Perichoresis) is our anthem for having a heart for our community and it is a call for every follower of Jesus.²

Jesus taught us to pray each day, "Your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven."³

Beginning to discover "God's dream"⁴ for your neighbourhood is the starting place for community engagement. As Christians, we often feel like we need to look for the brokenness, the problems and the deficits in our community and then get out there and try to fix them. Instead, a good place to start is by looking for what is strong, resilient, good, just, and aligned with Kingdom values and the fruit of the Spirit. When we look for where God's Kingdom is already breaking forth in our neighbourhood, we will begin to find the partners and opportunities to work alongside the Spirit in what he is already doing.

Questions:

1. Who is your neighbour? Who lives in your community, and even right next door or across the street? Who are local business owners, and the movers and shakers?
2. Are you a "known character" in your neighbourhood? What kind of reputation have you started to build?
3. What is God's dream for your neighbourhood? What would it look like for Heaven to overtake earth right here, right now?
4. Where can you already see signs of the Spirit at work? Where can you see Kingdom values and the fruit of the Spirit?
5. What are you going to do to join in with God's activity where you live?

Blessings,

Gayle and Jono,

BUV Mission Catalyst Team