

# Evangelism must die!



## bring Jesus

### Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



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#### 'What needs to occur is nothing short of the death of evangelism.'

That got my attention. It's a quote from the last chapter of a remarkable little book called *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*<sup>1</sup>. The authors go on to explain, 'By this we mean that the prevailing opinion about evangelism as one program in the church among many other programs, must die' (p. 114).

I remember when any congregation worth its salt had an evangelism committee. Mostly the committees talked about what others should do and perhaps they organised a program or two every year. Sometimes they tried to get willing people involved in 'dialogue evangelism' or 'friendship evangelism'. These were good programs in their day, and those who participated learned a lot, but—with some wonderful exceptions—they were never very effective in Australia and New Zealand.

We valued the practices of worship, pastoral care and fellowship as fundamental to being church together. Evangelism hopefully flowed out of those. It was **part** of what we did as a church. But too often it was left to those who were interested in that sort of thing—a sort of bolt-on extra to the life of a congregation. Nice to have, but not essential. That is the understanding of evangelism which needs to die.

But if we let evangelism die, then what happens in the church after that? The authors write, 'We pray for **the resurrection of an evangelising church culture** by the power of God'. What might an evangelising church culture look like?

An evangelising church will be more like a mission outpost than an institution. Constitutions and committees will be seen as a means to an end. Coming

together as church will be more about relationships than rules and procedures. An evangelising church sees buildings, equipment and other resources as gifts to be used. If we have lots of assets, we thank God for that blessing. If we don't, we get on with the task anyway.

Not only do we work with God, we are drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity. God is three persons in community who dwell in each other and are interdependent—yet they remain three distinct persons. We share in that life and we live it together in relationship with one another and those around us as a community. It is who we are—part of our identity, not just something we do.

We are a community who gather around word and sacrament in the power of the Spirit. We worship an evangelising God who sent his son Jesus into the world on a mission. As we share life with God, we are also sent into the world to be part of what Jesus is doing. Through us, Jesus once again becomes flesh and blood in real and concrete ways to the people of our communities. We are the body of Christ. Through us, others are drawn into our fellowship with one another and with God.

An evangelising church has people with different gifts and abilities. All play important roles and each has a common sense of purpose and direction. Perhaps only a few will be evangelists with the gift of regularly walking with others on the journey to faith, but **all** will be witnesses who speak of their faith in Jesus to their families, friends, workmates and neighbours. All pray. All serve in various ways. All will see themselves as a part of the mission of Jesus to their community.

In an evangelising church we will constantly remind each other that, through the work of the Spirit, the centre



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of our life together is Jesus and his mission. Our most vigorous discussions will be about opportunities to join Jesus in his mission to the world, not about how much authority to give our church councils, our struggling budgets or the maintenance of our buildings.

The evangelising church is not perfect. It is not some grand ideal that we cannot possibly live up to. Rather, an evangelising church is full of broken, sinful people who nevertheless, by God's grace, live the life of God together as a community. An evangelising church is real. It is not perfect. Therefore it has forgiveness and reconciliation at its heart.

Evangelism must die! No longer can evangelism be one program or ministry function alongside others. Rather, in an evangelising church culture, speaking the name of Jesus Christ and telling the story of what God has done for us will become as natural as talking about our families. **It is who we are.**

<sup>1</sup> *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* ed. Richard H Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

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As a church where love comes to life we establish a shared understanding of what it means to have a mission culture in the LCA, and clearly articulate the core values underpinning a missional culture.

LCA Strategic Direction 2013-2018, p13.  
<http://www.lca.org.au/sd>

