

# PREGNANT CONGREGATIONS BRING LIFE



## bring Jesus

### Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



*Steen also blogs at LCA eNews. To sign up to his newslist go to [www.lca.org.au/enews](http://www.lca.org.au/enews), insert your email address and tick the box next to 'bring Jesus'. He would also love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context.*

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#### **A healthy tree produces fruit. God created it to do just that.**

Jesus tells the story of a man who owned a fig tree that produced no figs, so he instructed the gardener to cut it down. The gardener replied, 'Let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down' (Luke 13:8,9 NRSV). Otherwise the fig tree is just a waste of space, or as Jesus said, it wastes the soil.

What is the fruit of an apple tree? An apple? Sure! Another apple tree? Yes! But more than that, the fruit of an apple tree is an orchard. An apple tree has within it the God-given potential to produce a whole orchard of apple trees. A healthy tree bears fruit.

What does God produce through a congregation? Christians who are baptised, gather at the table and live in the word? Of course. People who are cared for until they get to heaven? I definitely hope so. A steady stream of new people coming to faith and adults being baptised? We would expect that to be the case when the word is at work. People who live out their vocations as Christian parents, students, workers and volunteers in the world? Certainly. But more than that, a healthy congregation reproduces itself. It plants churches that plant churches.

Like the seed that falls into the ground and dies, it is only as we give away our life that it grows and multiplies. Sometimes I hear congregations say things like: 'We couldn't plant a new church because we can't afford to lose

good members'. Or: 'We don't have enough members to fill all our positions now; we couldn't possibly release some to start a community outreach'.

Good health implies looking outward. If your congregation is concerned only about itself and its members, then someone has been messing with your minds—and it wasn't the Holy Spirit. It is only as we go into the world that we grow as the people of God. Your children's ministry, ladies fellowship, men's shed, small groups, Longest Lutheran Lunch and church picnic are hopefully bringing blessing to those who attend. When they are also means of bringing Jesus to those who do not yet know him, the blessing is multiplied, not only for the new people but also for the Christians who attend.

How much of its time, energy and money does your congregation spend on reaching out to those who are not yet members? Thirty per cent? Twenty per cent? Maybe less than five per cent? That is a good question for you to ask. What if your congregation doubled the share of its resources used to bring Jesus to your local community?

Prioritising mission makes for a pregnant congregation. One that is bursting with new life. A congregation with people brimming with new ideas and enthusiasm for bringing Jesus to their friends, families, neighbours and workmates. Would the care of the widows and orphans get neglected? I don't think so. That probably hasn't happened very often since Acts 6. We are good at looking after our own, even if we don't do it perfectly. Let's become just as good at bringing good news to the world.



Does your congregation see outreach to your community as part of your pastor's calling? What if he skipped a few meetings so he could play golf with some non-Christian friends or meet them for a few drinks in a pub in order to build the relationships that allow him to witness to them? Would you say, 'Do that on your day off, Pastor. You are paid to care for our members.'

One older pastor told me some years ago that he was trained to be an aquarium keeper. Then he added, 'This place needs a fisherman'. That was undoubtedly true, but it is not just the pastor's job. A pregnant congregation needs members who fish for people. If you have members whom God has gifted to lead others into the kingdom, then free them to do that. Don't weigh

them down with many other tasks and responsibilities. Encourage them, pray for them and support them.

There is hope, even for a barren fig tree. That is the message of Jesus' parable. We can 'dig and dung'. The word of God and the Lord's Supper are fertiliser and nutrients for the baptised. Use them well. Don't clip the Spirit's wings. God has planted congregations so that they reproduce.

A pregnant congregation has the ongoing joy of witnessing the birth of new children of God. What could be better than that?

**Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.**



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Through its church planting mentor, Dean Eaton, the Board for Local Mission is offering three two-hour evangelism training sessions that are open to all comers.

Contact Dean via email [dean.eaton@lca.org.au](mailto:dean.eaton@lca.org.au) for more information.

