



BOARD FOR  
LOCAL MISSION  
*new and renewing churches*

## Renewing the Life of our Congregations and other Communities

When our 2013 General Synod adopted its **Strategic Direction 2013 – 2018** it called our Church to embrace the gift of repentance. It is a timely reminder that five hundred years ago Martin Luther posted 95 theses that began ‘When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent”, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.’

To repent is to allow the Spirit to shape our minds and lives according to God’s will and purpose. Repentance therefore involves change. It involves setting out in new directions, both individually and together. **Repentance is a process**, not just an occasional event. It is a way of life whereby the Spirit of God is continually modifying our journey and aligning it with God’s Word and his call on our lives. It is a life shaped by dwelling in the Word and lived in prayer-filled community.

### Embedding Good Habits in the Church

We are not just asking what we should believe – as important as that question is – but how we should live. **In doing so we are not seeking to identify a set of rules which must be obeyed. Rather we are asking what practices we need to embed in the fabric of our lives together, so that the things we believe may truly shape who we are.** Such practices are designed to disrupt the established pattern of our lives. If you like, this involves embracing repentance. As St Paul says

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect. [Rom 12:1-2]



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**LUTHERAN  
CHURCH**  
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**Mission is shaped by the cross.** We are called to take up the cross, die to self, and follow Jesus' example of humble service (Matthew 16:24, Phil 2:5-11). We proclaim Christ, crucified for the sin of the world and our sins, and raised from the dead so that all who live in him may be God's sons and daughters, the firstborn of God's new creation (1 Corinthians 1:23; 15:3,4; John 1:29; Romans 4:25; 8:21; 1 Peter 1:3).

**Renewing the church and renewing individuals go hand in hand.** They are two sides of the same coin. The church is people, called together in the body of Christ. A renewed congregation is a congregation of renewed people. Changing structures and programs is a waste of time if the life of each of us, individually, is not also being revitalised by the Spirit's work. Programs and other resources are a good and necessary part of our lives together. We have some good programs and will need more of them. However, our discussion here is about deeper cultural issues.

### **We are the Body of Christ in the World**

We want to grow the **missional culture** of our congregations and other communities. We want to develop a much deeper sense of being part of God's mission to his world. God sent Jesus into our world to redeem the world and bring good news to all people. Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit to bring Jesus to future generations and to lead and guide us along missional paths. Now Father, Son and Spirit send us into the world to join them in their work and so be people who in word and deed show the people of our world that God loves them and wants to bring them into his kingdom.

The Church does not have a mission. We join God in his mission to the world. The church does not send a few of its people to do mission, the whole church is sent by Jesus into the world. Mission flows from the Triune God. **The church, therefore, does not have a mission; Jesus' mission has a church!**

This does not mean that all Christians have the gift of being an evangelist. God has made us different so that our gifts complement those given to others. We are a community, or a team. Some are



evangelists, others intercessors, still others teach and some are great at caring for others. Some have practical helping gifts and some provide leadership. All witness to Jesus in what we say and do. Together we are the body of Christ in the world.

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## A Few Good Habits

Here are a number of healthy practices that we want to see grow as good habits in our lives and communities. This is not an exhaustive list nor are they all that should be said about congregational life. However, **we believe that if we embed these habits in our individual lives and communities they will bring change and grow our missional life-giving culture.**<sup>1</sup> These practices are not very controversial. Most of us will agree with all of them. There will be some variety in how we put them into practice and that is good. Our diversity means that more people will feel at home in one of our Church communities.

The LCA's Strategic Direction 2013 – 2018 calls us to:

*Develop a missional culture where individuals, families and communities are inspired, passionate and active in sharing the gospel in word and action.*

*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.* [Strategic Goal 2.1 and sub-point 1]

We do not need to work on all of these habits at once. **Dwelling in the Word is a good place to start**, since everything flows out of the Spirit's work through the Word. Then pick one or two of the others and reflect on how these practices are shaping your lives. Explore and experiment. Then reflect some more and consider the others as well. You can start with the leadership team of your congregation, your small group or with a few Christian friends who are prepared to give this a go.

### Forming a Learning Community

Our aim is not just to change our thinking or to have an interesting conversation, but to shape our lives together in such a way that we become a 'learning community'. **We learn by doing things together.** As we reflect on our experiences. We ask the 'God question'. "Where is God in this?" "Where do we discern the work of Jesus?" "What is the Spirit doing among us right now?" In doing this we listen to one another and so hear God speaking to us through the others in our group. We therefore value our conversations just as we value prayer and study of the Word. This is an example of action-reflection based learning.

*We live in exciting times. We are sailing together into uncharted waters, so we may zigzag and experiment in order to catch the wind of the Spirit and find where God is leading us in mission*

Remember the aim is not just to talk the talk. It is to form a 'community of practice' where we live the things we learn together in community. We are on a journey together. Our discussion is about navigation, not problem-solving. **We live in exciting times. We are sailing together into uncharted waters, so we may zigzag and experiment in order to catch the wind of the Spirit and find where God is leading us in mission.**<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> These have been shaped by a number of resources and approaches but we especially want to acknowledge Prof Pat Keifert and Dr Pat Taylor Ellison [www.churchinnovations.org](http://www.churchinnovations.org) and their six disruptive mission practices and related materials.

<sup>2</sup> See the very helpful discussion in the little booklet by Patrick Keifert and Nigel Rooms, *Forming a Missional Church : Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*. Grove pastoral series P139. (Grove Books, Cambridge UK, 2014) It can be obtained through [www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk) for £3.95 plus postage.

# Six Healthy Missional Practices

## #1 Life Flows out of the Word and Worship



The Triune God comes to us, his baptised people, as we gather to hear him speak and to receive the body and blood of Jesus. It is our practice to  **dwell in the Word**  whenever we gather in large or small groups, listening afresh to God speaking the gospel through Scripture and listening carefully to one another and those who have walked in *The Way* before us or in other places. We might immerse ourselves in the same text many times, listening each other into free speech and praying together.<sup>3</sup>

This approach may take a bit of practice, so don't worry too much if it takes a little while to get the hang of it. It is worth the effort!

Pick a text to dwell in together. Many start with Luke 10:1-12.

Begin with prayer that the Spirit may speak to you through his Word. Then have someone slowly read the text aloud. Try to listen as though you were hearing it for the first time. Take a little time for personal reflection. How does this address both your heart and your mind? What did you hear? Did anything surprise you? How does the text speak into your life and that of your group? Did any questions arise in your mind?

Then listen to one another. Split into pairs (best with someone you don't know very well, if that is possible) and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more. Listen carefully. If necessary wait for your partner to speak. (*Listen them into free speech.*) Feel free to take notes. Your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said (and not any of your own thoughts).

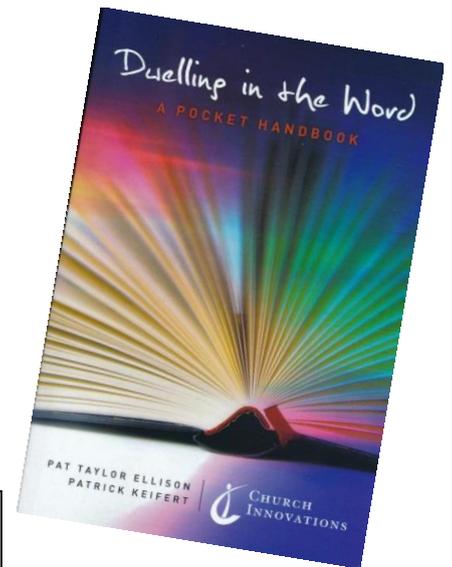
Each person gets to report back. Then pray and talk about it in the whole group. Take time. Don't rush the process. Over the weeks you will be blessed many times over.

We also **study the Word in depth**, delving into its themes and learning more about the 'big picture' of God's work in his world.<sup>4</sup>

**Individually, we find a devotional approach that fits the way we are 'wired'** and nourishes our personal relationship with God. Some need to examine themes from every angle; others make strong use of intuition and feeling. Some value spontaneity, others order and structure. As we encourage one another in this we recognise that 'one size does not fit all' and so we promote diverse approaches<sup>5</sup> with a common focus on the message of the gospel transforming our hearts and minds.



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<sup>3</sup> For example, we might use a *lectio divina* approach. For a good summary of this see Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, ***Dwelling in the Word – A Pocket Handbook*** Church Innovations, 2011. [www.churchinnovations.org](http://www.churchinnovations.org) [Copies may be available from the LCA SA/NT District Mission Department. Contact [mission@sa.lca.org.au](mailto:mission@sa.lca.org.au) or 08 8267 5211]

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Bible study resources at [www.crossways.org](http://www.crossways.org)

<sup>5</sup> See the link to Steen Olsen, ***Prayer – Different Approaches*** at <http://lca.org.au/mission.html>

## #2 Discerning God's Will Together

We practice **spiritual discernment** together, praying that the Spirit may clarify God's call on our lives. Again we listen carefully to one another, respecting God's presence in all his people and expecting to hear God's wisdom on the lips of other Christians. This is a normal practice in all the groups in our congregation, big and small. We pray for God to lead and guide us. We study his Word to clarify our values and mission. Each group seeks to understand God's purpose and direction for them. If necessary, we will start this process with just one or two groups.



The pastor and leaders will also call the whole congregation and all its parts to corporate discernment of its mission as together we seek to follow God out into his world. There are many 'centres' of leadership within the congregation. All God's wisdom is not to be found in the current leadership team. We will shape planning processes with **continuous community discernment** that flows out of dwelling in the Word and prayer.<sup>6</sup>

*We don't live and act as though we are atheists or agnostics. God is not remote and disinterested in what we are doing. He is involved and active in our everyday lives.*

Spiritual discernment is therefore part of our journey together. We believe that God is actively involved in our lives and so we listen for his leading and guiding. **We don't live and act as though we are atheists or agnostics. God is not remote and disinterested in what we are doing. He is involved and active in our everyday lives.** We believe that God is with us and leads and guides our communities.

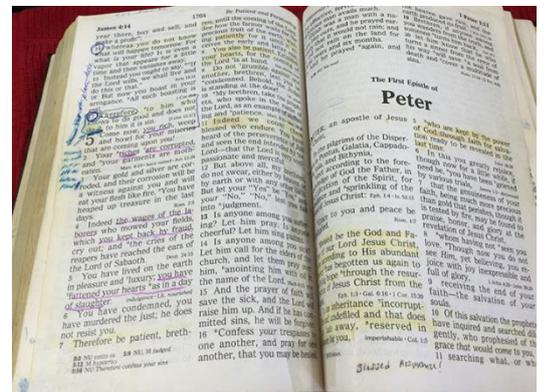
**There are many valid ways of doing this and they are all based on us being a people of the Word,** who are immersed in



Scripture so that our discernment is being shaped by the Bible. We bathe everything in prayer but we also sense God leading us as we discuss issues and at other times when we are not

in any sort of formal setting. We hear his wisdom on the lips of others. Sometimes we sense that an open door is one that we should walk through. We test everything by the Word of God and the discernment of the wider group. We are prepared to experiment. **Sometimes we will get it wrong, and that is ok too.** We learn from our mistakes, grow in faith-filled living and move on.

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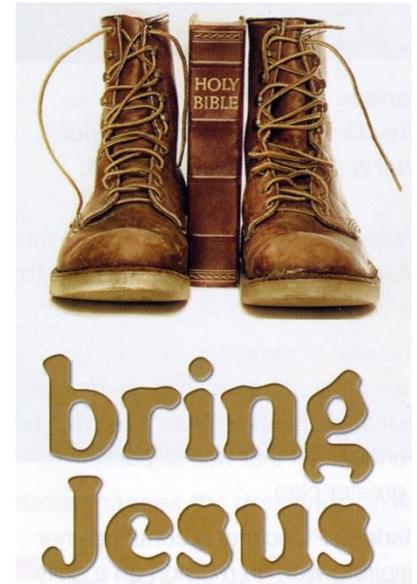


<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of current Christian thinking about planning processes see Alan J Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making – Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

### #3 Dwelling in the World Together

Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." [Jn 20:21] We cut back on our programming 'in church' so that we have time to engage with our neighbours, friends, families, workmates and those with whom we shop or enjoy leisure activities. We generally 'go' with at least one other Christian. We make it our practice to listen carefully to the people we meet and get to know. **We seek to join with what others are doing**, to work alongside them and build relationships with them. There is much we can do together with those who are not yet Christian. We are not there to solve all their problems but to honestly live life together with them.

We listen for the signs that God has been at work in his world, preparing people to hear the gospel. As we share in all things with those to whom we have been sent we are salt and light in the world and the yeast that brings the presence of the kingdom of God into our neighbourhoods and networks. We come as equals, not as those with all the answers. Wherever we go, **we bring Jesus**, because that is who we are. We can do no other.<sup>7</sup>



### #4 Receiving and Offering Hospitality

When Jesus sent the seventy to go ahead of him he told them to accept hospitality from a stranger; a **person of peace** they met in each town and village. [Lk 10:1-12] When meeting others we don't begin by saying, "Come back with us, to where we can offer you hospitality". We go, being prepared to accept hospitality on 'their turf', eating whatever they set before us. In time we invite them into our home and as they come to faith, we invite them to be baptised and to worship with us, either in our congregation or in a new worshipping group established out in their community.<sup>8</sup> We build genuine relationships where we can all share what is important to us. This is not just a program for winning converts. If they never believe, we will still be their friend.

The 'person of peace' is one in whom God has been at work preparing them for our arrival. They may not yet be a believer in Jesus, but are open to us and what we bring. They introduce us to their networks. When 'persons of peace' come to faith **they reap the harvest** in their own community.

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<sup>7</sup> For more than 120 stories of Christians dwelling in the world and the principles on which this is based see Michael Moynagh, **Being Church Doing Life: Creating gospel communities where life happens** (Monarch Books, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> See Larry McCrary et al, **Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission** (Urban Loft Publishers, 2013), especially chapter 5 *Building Relationships* and chapter 6 *Persons of Peace*.

## #5 Witnessing in Word and Deed

We build real relationships with those who do not know Jesus. We learn the skills of speaking of Jesus and what he has done for us in a natural, appropriate way.<sup>9</sup> We seek the Spirit's guidance as to the right time and how much to say. It isn't a program or a presentation we memorise. We know we are far from perfect and so need to ask for forgiveness like everyone else. And yet, in spite of our weakness, the things we do bear testimony to what we say.

We don't need to know the answers to all the tricky questions. We just tell others what we know about Jesus and what he has done for the world, for us personally and wants to do for them. We grow in confidence in our witness as we learn from others and pray for each other. We listen for signs of the Spirit's work in those to whom we speak. We ask, **"What do you believe about Jesus?"** and when we hear a response of faith we help to clarify their understanding, affirm that in prayer and welcome another believer into the kingdom of God. We explain what this means and walk with them on their journey of discipleship.



*We listen for signs of the Spirit's work in those to whom we speak. We ask, "What do you believe about Jesus?"*

## #6 Working for the Healing of the World

We know the one who will bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head; the Lord of all creation himself, Jesus the Christ. The world will be fully healed when every knee bows and all creation acknowledges its creator and Lord. The love of God for all people lives in us and is expressed in care and concern for those we meet.

Our main purpose as the church is not creating a better world, but that is still a by-product of what we do. We serve a righteous God who has redeemed his world, so **bringing care and seeking justice** is naturally a part of what we do as citizens of God's world. In this regard Mike Moynagh has a helpful discussion of various views and approaches in a chapter on the purpose and nature of the church in his magnificent work *Church for Every Context*.<sup>10</sup>



Every journey begins with a single step. You can't do everything at once. It is good to start with leadership groups in your congregation, but you can start with any group. Make it your normal practice to dwell in the Word together. Spend time jointly discerning your future under the leading of the Spirit. Bathe it all in prayer. It is a journey you are not fully in control of, not a destination that you arrive at. It is a way of living life together, not a program to be implemented. **The Board for Local Mission is providing resources to help you on this journey.....** (see over the page)



<sup>9</sup> See for example, David Male and Paul Weston, *The Word's Out – Speaking the Gospel Today* (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (SCM Press, 2012), p99ff.



# RENEW

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND BLOOD,  
AND MOVED INTO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.  
JOHN 1.14 MESSAGE

## Support from the Board for Local Mission

The Board for Local Mission (BLMiss) is providing some resources and training to help our congregations to embed these good habits in their life together. You might choose to use these resources or you may find others or develop your own. Whatever path you decide to take, we hope that all pastors and congregations of the Lutheran Church of Australia will agree that these habits or practices are indeed among those that we need to embed in all our communities and that everyone will therefore work to strengthen and release them in their local congregations.



BLMiss is focussed on 'new and renewing churches'. We have partnered with ten sending congregations to plant thirty new churches in the next decade. Healthy churches plant healthy churches so as part of this process BLMiss is assisting with congregational and leadership formation. Our evangelism training workshops are open to all who wish to attend. Church planting teams will be equipped and mentored. This is all part of establishing 'new churches'.

**A healthy sending church is simply a healthy church.** We want to support all LCA communities in their journey toward better health. Therefore, the approaches and resources being used in our ten sending churches are now being made available to all congregations, schools and other communities in the LCA, to assist them on their journey to renew or revitalise their life together. We are doing this under the 'renew' banner and repackaging our materials to suit this context. We will provide three series of Bible Studies:



This complements the NEW Evangelism Training and is a series of 5 small group Bible studies designed to renew local mission in a congregation, school or other community setting.



A ten session small group Bible study series designed to train congregational leaders to facilitate local mission and healthy church life, by creating healthy expectations and structures.



A small group Bible study designed to form two small teams – one that focuses on witnessing and another that provides pathways for new believers to grow and become full participants in the life of the people of God.

For more information about this please contact your district mission director or a member of the Board for Local Mission. For information on The BLMiss church planting program and evangelism workshops please contact our Church Planting Mentor Dean Eaton on [dean.eaton@lca.org.au](mailto:dean.eaton@lca.org.au)