



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, 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.

You can email him at steen.olsen@lca.org.au with 'bring Jesus' as the subject line.

I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW!

Back in our New Zealand days, my then vice-president gave my wife Ruth a fridge magnet that says, 'Living with a Dane builds character'. That just about sums it up—except that it doesn't just apply to those who, like me, were born in Denmark. All of us can be hard to live and work with. We are capable of bringing hurt and pain into the lives of those we love the most.

In the second-last chapter of the Bible, God the Father, seated on his throne in heaven, says, 'See, I am making all things new' (Revelation 21:5). It is my favourite text. I hope that someday, someone might preach it at my funeral. I am so glad that our heavenly Father did not say, 'See, I am making all new things'. There is a world of difference between making things new and making new things. Making new things would mean that there was no room for this old thing, namely me. God would destroy me and start again, creating someone new.

God promises to make me new in spite of all my faults and problems. Our heavenly Father is a specialist at new beginnings. He has redeemed us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore he renews us, to make us like Jesus. That renewal will be complete only in heaven, so (if you are preaching at my funeral) feel free to make the point that all the bad things

about Steen, all the things that made him hard to live and work with, are now gone. That should lead to considerable thanksgiving to God, which is appropriate at a Christian's funeral.

But this isn't just about heaven. Our new life begins with our baptism. The Spirit is at work now. That doesn't mean that we will sin less and less until we become almost perfect. That is an underestimation of the seriousness of our problem. If anything, as we mature we become more aware of the depth of our depravity. As a young Christians, we may view sin primarily as doing things like drinking too much, not telling the whole truth or disliking someone. Then, as we grow, we come to understand the depth of our sinful pride and selfishness. Even our best actions are spoiled by our mixed motives.

Sin's grip will continue to hold us while we remain in this world. We are not part of some human improvement crusade to make us flawless and the world a better place. Rather, it is in the midst of my weakness and failure that God makes me new by the power of the Spirit at work in the word, through the water that was poured on me so long ago and with the bread and the wine.

Bringing Jesus to others flows out of who we are. Not a program. Not a technique. That means that renewal is at the heart of mission. We don't bring Jesus to others because it is our



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duty. As we pray, 'Create a new spirit within me, Lord', the love of God for others grows within us. We will want to find ways of sharing the best thing we know. The Spirit's renewing work is giving us a new heart and mind, and nudging us to share the good news about Jesus with others.

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 renewed. That means going back to basics. We read and study the word. We pray, both together and alone. We encourage one another in these things. We gather to worship and are strengthened in faith

and love. God is at work. He is making all things new!

So do we focus on our renewal so that one day in the future we might be ready to bring Jesus to others? Not at all. That will never work. Quite simply, most of us will never feel ready. No, it is as we bring Jesus to our family, friends and workmates that we are renewed. As we go, we grow.

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

Last year the Board for Local Mission put its energy into establishing a new church planting program and supporting African and Asian ministry and mission. That is the new part of its tagline new and renewing churches. In 2015 the emphasis will shift to also include renewing discipleship and communities in the LCA.

See lca.org.au/local-mission

