



Rev. Malcolm Falloon

Keeping Evangelism on the Agenda

One of the important pastoral tasks in church life is ensuring that the main thing – the Gospel – remains as the main thing!

One of the ways of doing that is keeping evangelism as central to the life of the local church. Yet I know from experience that affirming the place of evangelism in principle is a lot easier than achieving it in practice. For there are many things in a church's life that can crowd in and either distract or hinder the work of evangelism. So, I spoke with three evangelists working with local churches, in order to encourage us to keep evangelism on the agenda and as a central concern of Anglican church-life.



**Phil Clark,
National Director
of Church Army**

Phil's work involves him in resourcing and enabling evangelism and evangelists. Church Army is an Anglican

society, but he assures me, they will work with anybody throughout New Zealand.

I asked Phil how he became involved in evangelism. "Well," said Phil, "I guess, as a young guy growing up, I loved Jesus but often struggled with church, and wanted to live this Jesus lifestyle, but didn't know how to... So, when I encountered Church Army and found that they were working in all kinds of interesting places - with largely unchurched people, that was absolutely what I wanted to do."

For Phil, the greatest challenge that churches need to overcome with regard to evangelism is persuading Christians that evangelism is not that difficult in the New Zealand context: "I think we have built up a whole understanding that nobody wants to hear about Jesus, that we are living in a very secular country, that you'll lose your friends if you start talking about God, etc, etc. But I have found exactly the opposite, that the vast majority of Kiwis are happy to have spiritual conversations, that they are happy to share what they believe, that they are happy to hear what Christians

believe. The person of Jesus is as compellingly attractive as he ever has been. But most people in churches don't believe any of what I have just said."

I pressed Phil as to how he goes about changing those attitudes. "To be honest," he said, "the only way we can prove to them that what we say is true is by grabbing them by the hand and taking them out with us." That is why any training programme run by Church Army will always have a practical element, taking people out door-knocking, or to a shopping mall, or into people's homes to do a simple Bible study. "In this way," said Phil, "they are encountering non-Christians and seeing for themselves that there is actually a real hunger for what we have as Christians, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

That is why Phil would love to be invited by churches around the country to come for a weekend or even a week and do some basic training and give people a real experience of evangelism. He assures me that he won't just come for the weekend and then disappear, but will walk with churches through the whole journey. "The only way people are really going to learn is by doing it, and then they get excited when they realize how easy it is, how do-able it is, and then it just becomes part of how they live as Christians – it's not a special event anymore. And that's really what we are aiming towards."

I asked Phil what he thought about the idea of conversion and whether he thought it was still a helpful term. "I think it is. I think that conversion is still something that absolutely happens today – in all different ways, obviously – but it's still something we should try and mark if we possibly can." Using the illustration of marriage he said, "I courted my wife for a period and we have worked at being married for a long time. But we still had an actual day when we went through a wedding ceremony and that was a very important day for us."

Phil related the story of a woman who had come to faith a few weeks ago and was baptized in her local Anglican church. She posted on Facebook that she had met someone at the shops who she couldn't stand, who a few months ago she might even have attacked. "But I didn't," she said, "instead, I walked past her and just smiled!" For Phil, that was evidence that something really significant had happened in her life – "and she can tell you when and where it happened!"



**Tim Wilson,
Evangelism
Enabler, Sydenham,
Christchurch**

I asked Tim about his job and he told me his role was to keep evangelism

constantly in the thinking of his congregation, to encourage and support those doing it and to provide tools and resources for people to use. The particular focus for Tim is evangelism in the workplace. So, although he might organise the odd event, his main focus is getting church members talking one-on-one with their friends and work colleagues about the Gospel.

Tim has come to this ministry after 14 years in London at All Soul's Langham Place, where he discovered a growing desire to see people reached with the Gospel, especially as he saw the way that the Gospel was powerfully changing people's lives. So returning to New Zealand four years ago, he looked for a job that he could do part-time in order to be free to encourage others to tell the Gospel. Tim told me, "one of my passions is to make the workplace a place where people can connect with their friends in a Christian fashion."

For Tim, it's not about inviting non-Christian friends to church events (though that happens): "I think that the ground work of working one-on-one and the relationships formed there is the real engine of evangelism." The difficulty is that many in the Church, especially guys, have trouble doing that with each other, let alone with their non-Christian work colleagues. So Tim's aim is to encourage Church members to start meeting up

with each other and reading the Bible together and then being encouraged to start doing the same with their non-Christian friends. For Tim, it's about getting Christians modelling for themselves the way the Gospel can be shared with others and then to start praying together in small teams for their friends. "People may not have even had that experience within their own Christian life, so we have to start the enabling of that process."

Tim was keen to point out some great resources that are available for sharing a Bible Study with friends. As an instance, Tim spoke about One to One Through John: "I think its brilliant material for our day and age – I love the way its got the text of the Bible on the page (so you don't need to take a Bible as well), there are some arrows pointing to stuff explaining a little bit for the person who has just read it through (it's a nice short section). And not only are there some questions about the passage it also gives you the answers. So the person reading it can feel comfortable enough to say I know where this is going, I'm not going to be made uncomfortable, I can just point to the answers and we can talk about it, I can go in as deep as I want, or I can just stay back and we can zap through this."

"One of my passions is to make the workplace a place where people can connect with their friends in a Christian fashion."

The experience of student work in the UK, is that it is those who have first been involved in one-on-one Bible Studies who are more likely to find a Christian event helpful and respond positively to an invitation to come.

Another resource that Tim has found useful is Questioning Evangelism by Randy Newman. "It's superb material," says Tim, "that changes your mind-set." What Questioning Evangelism does is follow the example of Jesus in asking serious questions and listening to the answers people give,

rather than attempting to “download” the Gospel in every conversation.

When I asked Tim about what he understood by conversion, he replied, “I suppose I’m looking for them to change direction.” One of the signs would be a new awareness of sin, that they are not living as Christ would want them, and to say ‘Oh, I’ve got this problem now, and I never saw it before!’ “I look for them to turn from that and choose a different way.”



**Cam Gracey,
National Coordinator
for Christianity
Explored**

Christianity Explored is a course that walks people through Mark’s Gospel

asking three questions: Who is Jesus, why did he come, and what does it mean to follow him? For Cam, it’s a way of letting the Gospel tell the Gospel: “In some way shape or form within our ministries we need to be explicitly and articulately communicating the Gospel to people.” Cam points out that, because we hate to offend people, we often try to win people by being like them rather than engaging them with the Gospel message itself - “for many there has been a loss of trust that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation.”

But it’s a power that Cam knows in his own life, becoming a Christian in his late twenties while in the UK with his wife. “We had gone over there to do our OE like a lot of kiwis do. And a friend of ours, who was a Christian, had gone over there at the same time. And she was a good friend to us and occasionally we would go along to her church. After a period of time, she said ‘there’s a course my church is running, its called Christianity Explored and I think its a really good representation of what I actually believe in, would you like to come along?’” Cam told me that they went along out of curiosity about their friend’s beliefs and an openness to Christianity in general. “For me it was a bit like God took me into a dark room and turned the light on!”

It’s easy to see why Cam is such an advocate for Christianity Explored material. But for Cam the course works at a number of levels. It can be the “front-door” for people hearing the Gospel for the first time. But it also helps Christians: “I’ve seen a number of people from within my own church greatly edified from simply coming through the course and getting a renewed zeal and then wanting to get out there and tell other people the good news.” Christianity Explored also models for people in the church how to present the Gospel to others. “So over a period of time you will find that people themselves are more confident in the Gospel itself.”

Cam explains that the course walks people right through Mark’s Gospel over a seven week period, with perhaps a day away. But it’s flexible enough to be run in a number of different formats - a Wednesday night, a lunchtime in the CBD, or even on Sunday morning for newcomers.

Christianity Explored, in Cam’s view, is a great way of creating an overall framework for a gospel-hearted church. “Its not the be all and end all,” says Cam, “outreach can happen at a number of different levels.” But Cam does insist that at the heart of all the church’s varied ministries, there must remain the articulate communication of the Gospel message - “If that’s not happening, then you are a social club more than a church!”

With regard to conversion, Cam looks at it from two points of view. Firstly, from God’s viewpoint it is about a new obedience to the Lord Jesus instead of following the “consortium” of the world, the flesh and the devil. “Up to the age of 28, I wouldn’t have said it was that, but in hindsight, it most definitely was!” But conversion brings a new obedience of faith. Secondly, from a Church’s viewpoint, there is a new zeal to know God and to know the Lord Jesus - “to be changed, to be conformed more and more to the likeness of him as our life goes on.” This is displayed in a deepening desire to grow and live in obedience to his Word and a turning out of ourselves in self-giving toward others. “So I would expect to see some sort of change in that direction as a person’s life progresses in the local church.”