

From Pastor's Desk...

OUR OUTWARD VISION: COMMUNITY A PLACE FOR US

A common definition of community emerged as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. Church itself is a community, Bible based, Christo-centric and Spirit-guided exists for mission with a broader perspective.

There are two instructions of Jesus- a Great Commandment, "love your neighbor" (Mt 22:39), and a Great Commission, "go and make disciples" (Mt.28:19-20). John Stott explains it very well as a scriptural foundation in his book, Christian Mission in the Modern World. What is the relation between the two? Some of us behave as if we thought them identical, so that if we share the gospel with somebody, we consider we have completed our responsibility to love him. But no. The Great Commission neither explains nor exhausts, nor supersedes the Great Commandment.

We need to know, love and serve the community around us. Many churches are called homogeneous congregations because their memberships are made up of similar kinds of people. The churches in Jerusalem (which according to Acts 6 and 15 was primarily Jewish culture) and Ephesus (Eph. 2:11, primarily Gentile) were Homogeneous congregations. A second approach is to adapt the church programs and worship to reach to a broader socio-cultural, ethnic and linguistic base. Congregations who examine this option closely are called heterogeneous congregation in Antioch, described in Acts 13:1.

We need to create and use a ministry- based evangelistic strategy that brings people to Christ. Our neighbor is neither a bodiless soul that we should love his soul, nor a soulless body that we should care for its welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from society. If we love our neighbor as God made him, we must inevitably be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body, and his community.

We are sent into the world, like Jesus, to serve. This is the natural expression of our love for our neighbors. We are called and commissioned to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16). We are to influence and impact the community through various community events: music concert, language learning, medical camp, providing clothes and food to the needy, school supply, blood donations etc. Along with our invitation to 'come in' the sanctuary let us also 'go out' to meet the needs of others in fulfilling our outward mission.

God bless you.

In His Glorious Ministry,

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The Distributed Church

Bejoy Mathew

The purest model of community is the Godhead - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A study of the interconnectedness of the Trinity offers a strong precedent in relationships. It is the Father who is the master planner and sovereign ruler over all things. It is the Son who represents these purposes and enters the world to convey the good news of the Father's intentions. And it is the Holy Spirit who prods and nudges, convicts and rebukes, empowers, and overcomes resistance and moves people to salvation and godliness.

One hears the Father encouraging the Son ("You are my son ..."), the Son exalting the Father ("I speak his words ... I do his business ... see me and you've seen the Father"), the Father sending the Holy Spirit ("I will send you a counselor"). The harmonious work of the Trinity is a pattern to which all followers of the Lord should aspire. One finds no ambition, competition, conflict, or confusion in the community of the godhead. This greatly impresses me. "Each one of you," Apostle Peter writes, "should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

A community is meant to be a bank of Spirit-given capabilities. Some but not all gifts are mentioned in the New Testament. Each is designed to bolster the strength of the community and then to project the power and resource of the gospel outward to the larger population around us.

Unfortunately, we tend to loudly applaud the gifts of preaching and leadership and ignore gifts like helping and mercy. But I suspect this imbalance of recognition will be rectified at the awards banquet in heaven.

Occasionally, we attend a LA Symphony concert. We always arrive extra early, and I notice the diversity of instruments (small to large) and musicians that play them (also small to large). During warm up time, the noise the orchestra makes can be a tad unpleasant.

Suddenly, the concert meister gestures the orchestra into silence and signals the oboist to sound an A. Once more the musicians tune their instruments. When they are finished, the conductor enters the hall, lifts her baton, and soon we hear Mozart or Dvorak or Mahler speaking to us through music.

How can any sound be so enthralling? It comes from a community of gifted musicians who bring to life their particular parts of the composition. No one competes; no one attempts to neutralize another. All submit to the conductor's tempo and musical accent.

This is also the way of a gifted community. Each person blends in with the other players. And just as we hear the music of the composer, so we hear the "music" of Jesus when members of his community "play" together.