Election season 2012 has just ended and the overheated political climate has had folks choosing up sides. Both parties promised to save us from the domestic and foreign messes we’ve gotten ourselves into. And both parties wanted to count at least some Christians among their “base.”

At a time like this, it might be worthwhile to remember that Christians have, do, and will live under a variety of political systems, all of them broken. And while it’s easy to see and fear, with justification, what happens to Christians and churches under some regimes; we are also called to remember that no matter what kind of culture we live in, we will be—or at least we should be—an alternative society... a counter culture.

St. Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). And like being a citizen of an earthly country means having a particular worldview and set of values, being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven means having the peculiar worldview and values of Jesus.

To be citizens of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated means more than that we are personally saved from sin and death and, in a truncated understanding of eschatology, that we’ll “go to heaven when we die.” It means that we think and act now in ways that spring from Jesus’ own worldview. It means that we think and act in the self-giving and sacrificial love of Jesus for our neighbors. It means that we do our best to enact in our benighted and broken world today what will be forever when finally comes that Day; when all
creation is restored; when the new heaven and earth are revealed; and when there is no longer any tears or crying or pain because the darkness has been dispelled and the day of hope has come and God himself has wiped every tear from every eye.

To live that way, and not to be co-opted by contemporary culture, is always a serious challenge. The culture’s traps are subtle and sinister. The powerful of this world will always work to win us to their side; they will tempt us to view ourselves as consumers; they will seduce us into self-seeking moralities.

A number of years ago, in his book, *A Peculiar People*, Rodney Clapp wrote that American Christianity is compromised to the culture regarding consumerism and sexuality (and probably more). He discerned the origins of this compromise in the state’s sponsorship of the church begun in the Constantinian era. And what a sponsorship it has been! For some reason the church failed to recognize that with sponsorship comes compromise. The one who sponsors you puts restrictions on you for his benefit: just ask Alex Smith, the 49ers quarterback who had taken to wearing a Giants cap during post-game interviews and was threatened with a $15,000 fine if he did it again!

Whose citizens are we, really? Which king has our allegiance?

The CNH District, under President Newton’s direction, has 5 aspects of what it means to be the church in mission. The second of these is this:

*The church is an alternative community that is intentionally counter-cultural.* As a missional church, this community lives rejecting the secular materialist/consumerist philosophical foundations of contemporary culture. Additionally, Christians see themselves first as citizens of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated, not first as citizens of the nation in which they find themselves.

“An alternative community.” One way to understand the church is that it is that body which gathers to eat something other than the current cultural king’s fare (see Daniel 1). Hearing a counter-cultural Gospel messages communicated and strengthened by God’s own holy feast, we’re to live peculiarly different from those still under the thrall of false messages and food that defiles.

How might we do that? In this issue of *MissionalLeadership*, that’s the topic we’re taking on. Rev. Eric Johnson shares a story of mission work among those outcast from the larger society. Rev. Dan Duel’s article is about working to rescue victims of the sex trade. Rev. Jon Coyne writes about the kind of mindset that’s necessary to identify and think through the mission options that present themselves. Finally, Dr. Robert Newton’s article addresses the need to keep mission in “balance” with congregational ministry. I know that’s a lot of Rev’s and we’re working to include more Mr’s and Mrs’s in upcoming issues.

I’d also like to encourage you to check out the CNH District’s discussion group at cnh-transforming.ning.com. There you’ll find an opportunity to join in the discussion of these articles as well as the discussion of other mission-related ideas.

Pax,
Rev. Tom Norris
CNH District Communications Director
Assoc. Pastor, Bethany Lutheran Church, Menlo Park, CA
Jesus Saves

Rev. Eric Johnson

Mike was dying. Years of alcohol and drug abuse had taken its toll and now the once robust and powerfully built man of 62 was reduced to a shrunken, emaciated shadow of his former self. The Doctors gave Mike no more than two weeks to live.

I met Mike at a local mobile home park the Lord had given to us as a mission field. Our little mission congregation had been praying and asking the Lord of the harvest to help us find ways to connect with our community so that we could earn the opportunity to share the hope we have in Christ with those who don’t yet know him. The Lord’s answer to our prayers was Rancho Feliz mobile home park.

Rancho Feliz is the last stop for many broken and hurting people. Many of the residents are living at or below the poverty line. As the low income mobile home park in our community, Rancho Feliz is full of broken, hurt and forgotten people. Drug, alcohol, and sexual abuse are rampant, and gangs are active. Satan has a stronghold here. Darkness surrounds Rancho Feliz and the hopelessness and despair created by sin and the evil one is almost palpable. Nobody loved or cared about the people of Rancho Feliz, except for Jesus.

Our mission congregation, about 30 people strong at the time, prayerfully decided to go to Rancho Feliz one Saturday before Thanksgiving to give away $25 Safeway gift cards for people to use for Thanksgiving dinner. We had planned to give away complete Thanksgiving dinners, but the logistics of buying and storing frozen turkeys until we could give them away was too much for us to handle, so we decided instead to buy Safeway gift cards. The people in our little mission gave generously and we ended up buying $1,500 worth of $25 gift cards!

The Saturday before Thanksgiving 12 people from our congregation went to Rancho Feliz and began to prayerfully walk around the mobile home park in groups of three, asking the Lord to lead us to the people he wanted us to meet and serve. Wonderful doors of opportunity opened for us and we connected with many people who were in genuine need of Christ and the food cards we were giving away. Our people had the chance to pray with some of the folk at the park, and to experience firsthand some of the deep needs in the community.

One of our groups was led to knock on the door of the mobile home where Mike lay dying. Theresea, the owner of the mobile home answered the door and immediately connected with our team. She invited the team into her home where she shared some of her struggles, including the story of how her former boyfriend ended up lying in a spare room of her home, dy-
ing. She asked the team if they could pray for Mike, and they did. Sensing that there was more going on there than the team was ready to handle on their own, they came looking for me.

Upon arriving at the Mobile home, I was warmly welcomed by Theresea, her daughter, granddaughters and son in law. After a few minutes of conversation I was invited to the back bedroom to meet Mike. Mike had been a businessman and a two-fisted hard partying biker. As we talked, Mike opened up and shared with me many of his past mistakes and sins. He lamented the life he had wasted through the abuse of drugs, alcohol and sex. He was sorry for the many lives he had hurt and was very much afraid of dying. All his life Mike had ignored God, and now staring death in the face he was afraid to stand before God and give an account for the wasted, selfish, and self-centered life he had led.

Being invited into a stranger’s home and given the opportunity to minister into a dying man’s life was a moving and humbling experience. After listening to Mike share his doubts and shame, I asked him about his ideas on faith. Mike said he believed in God, but was afraid of him and scared of going to hell. I was able to share the Gospel of Christ with Mike and the assurance that those who trust in Jesus have their sins taken away and can stand before God without fear. With tears streaming down his weak and emaciated face, Mike said he wanted to be saved but his sins were too great. He couldn’t believe that through Jesus Christ, God could be so compassionate and merciful. This was not the salvation, nor the God, that Mike had heard about during his life. He only knew of a-condemning God that required him to practice a religion of trying to look and act perfect and holy. Mike just couldn’t get his mind around the fact that God loved him just as he was, a broken sinner without hope in the world.

Over the next week, I had the opportunity to visit Mike several times. The last time we visited he was very close to death and was fading in and out of consciousness. In a brief few minutes of God given clarity, Mike told me he had been thinking about the faith and he wanted Jesus to save him and take away all the bad he had done. He was truly sorry for the life he had lived and desperately wanted to be saved. I gathered the household to come and stand with Mike as I baptized him into the faith and salvation of Jesus Christ. We talked and prayed with Mike for a few more minutes before he slipped back into unconsciousness. Two days later, having never regained consciousness, Mike died in the complete assurance of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life with Christ.

Through this encounter, God had miraculously redeemed a monstrously evil and sinful life. A sinner bound for eternal separation from God had turned to Christ in his hour of greatest fear and need and was received into Christ’s waiting arms. What a merciful and awesome God we serve. Mike’s story doesn’t end there, Theresea and her family also came to Christ through our connection, and Theresea became one of our most faithful members and an active co-worker in Christ’s kingdom. As we stepped outside the comfort zone of our church and began to prayerfully follow Christ into the community, Jesus continues to do his work in people’s lives in and through us!

So far 32 adults and 10 children have been baptized into Christ and his church through our on-going mission to Rancho Feliz. There are many more stories to be told of what Jesus has done in the lives of people as we have stepped outside our comfort zone in reaching out to broken and hurting people.

Rev. Eric Johnson is pastor of Word of Grace Lutheran Church in Rohnert Park, CA.
Thy Kingdom Come:
The Church’s Response to Sex Trafficking

Rev. Dan Deuel

Yet Another Thing They Didn’t Teach Me In Seminary

“Pastor Dan, I got an ‘A’ on my test!” So said the young woman that bounced into my office one afternoon. This young woman, attending one of our local schools, had been attending our church for a month or two at this point. I don’t usually have college age people do this, so I sat back and congratulated her and invited her to sit down so we could talk and I could learn more about her. I had a sense she was seeking affirmation and wondered what was going on in her life and what kind of family or friend network she had. Not much, apparently. I learned she had left living with one parent (not a good situation as she related the story) to come out to California for a fresh start with her other parent. This did not go well for very long either.

It was about ten minutes into the conversation when I began to get a very uneasy feeling about what had transpired in this young woman’s life over the last couple years. The Spirit of God began to whisper something that I knew I had to ask. It was

Sex Trafficking FAQs

What is sex trafficking?
Sex trafficking is the act of forcing, coercing, or transporting a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. These crimes are primarily committed against women and children. Sex trafficking can occur in residential brothels, brothels disguised as massage parlors, strip clubs, and via online escort services and street prostitution.

How widespread is this problem?
Human sex trafficking is the most common form of modern-day slavery. Estimates place the number of its domestic and international victims in the millions, mostly females and children enslaved in the commercial sex industry for little or no money. The terms human trafficking and sex slavery usually conjure up images of young girls beaten and abused in faraway places, like Eastern Europe, Asia, or Africa. Actually, human sex trafficking and sex slavery happen locally in cities and towns, both large and small, throughout the United States, right in citizens’ backyards.

Not only is human sex trafficking slavery but it is big business. It is the fastest-growing business of organized crime and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world. The majority of sex trafficking is international, with victims taken from such places as South and Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, Central and South America, and other less developed areas and moved to more developed ones, including Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America. Unfortunately, however, sex trafficking also occurs domestically. The United States not only faces an influx of international victims but also has its own homegrown problem of interstate sex trafficking of minors.

How many are sex slaves right now?
Conservatively, it’s estimated that 3 million women and children are enslaved for sex right now. Each is likely between the age of 12 and 14.

Sources:
California Attorney General
FBI
Courage Worldwide
nothing she said directly, for I am sure she didn’t want me to know what she had gone through. But I finally asked her, “Have you been trafficked?” It was a blunder of a question, for she didn’t know what I meant. But then I asked if she had been forced to be a prostitute, and she answered in the affirmative. I immediately sensed she felt judged in my presence for me even asking the question, and I quickly went into gospel-centered mode to help her realize how sorry I was for the situation she had endured and that I was there to support her and help her in any way possible. Months later, I still am supporting this young woman who is trying to get her life together after going through one of the most heinous crimes against a human being that our sinful world has invented in its rebellion against God.

How did I know what she had gone through? I would like to say that it is because I am so attuned to the problems of the world or that I am an exceptionally gifted listener or pastor, but I think that would be quite a bit of a stretch. I credit the Spirit of God and the training that I went through to make me aware of one of the most insidious, hidden, yet growing crimes in our culture today. Partnering with Courage To Be You (Courage Worldwide), I went through their Faith in Crisis Academy, which provides training designed to equip Courage Worldwide’s volunteers to identify and help victims of sex trafficking. My church had sponsored a concert in Stockton in tandem with Courage Worldwide in order to raise awareness of this issue for the members of our congregation and the local community. I also hope to host this training in Stockton sometime in the near future.

The Problem

You may not be aware that sex trafficking of minors is becoming increasingly common in communities across the United States. It is no longer reserved for the brothels of Thailand, Cambodia, and other far away regions where perverts with plenty of money go to satiate their sinful lusts. Instead this crime (it has never been nor ever will be “victimless”) has increased tenfold in the last few years, by some police and government agency estimates.

Understand what I mean by the term sex trafficking: I refer to any and all activity where a human being is sold to a consumer for any kind of sexual/physical act. I prefer the term trafficking over prostitution because it conveys the sense of slavery that prostitution/trafficking is for the women (and sometimes men) who are being sold for sex in our world.

I’ve been told the “average” consumer (john) of sex-trafficked minors (or those under the age of 18), looks like your average LCMS pastor. They are often professional businessmen, fathers, husbands, and far too often churchgoers. With the explosion of pornography and its acceptance and availability in our society today, these crimes of sexual lust and violence have increased rapidly along with it. Pornography is a deceptive, unrealistic, and demonic
portrayal of sex and sexuality, and many who consume pornography ultimately find themselves seeking ways to satiate their ungodly lusts by buying the services of women and, increasingly, girls under the age of 18.

Consider some of the recent statistics on sex trafficking in the United States:

The internet is being used as a tool to sell children for sex. There are countless ads that offer “erotic services” with juveniles photographed in the ads. This problem is wide-spread and furthers the hidden nature of this crime. And it has gone mainstream. For instance, you might remember the anger the founders of Craig’s List displayed when they were being pressured to remove their “erotic services” category.

“Worldwide, the average age of entrance into prostitution is 13. The greatest factor in promoting child sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation is the demand for younger and younger victims. Most women in prostitution are trafficked into the sex industry as children.”

The average age of U.S. children being forced into child prostitution (i.e. sex trafficking) is 12–14 years old.

Domestic sex trafficking of minors is a prominent and growing issue in the greater Sacramento area. In the last several years, a local FBI task force has recovered over 200 girls being sold for sex; the youngest was eleven years old. Of the 200 girls rescued in the Sacramento area, a large percentage of them have no home, no family, and no services to support them.

According to UNICEF, as many as two million children are subjected to prostitution in the global commercial sex trade. Just imagine every NFL stadium in the US filled to capacity with these young victims—that is how many people are being tortured through this crime every day in this world.

Due to the hidden nature of the crime of sex trafficking, the exact number of domestic children being trafficked in the United States is unknown, but a University of Pennsylvania study estimated nearly 300,000 youth in the United States were at risk of being sexually exploited for commercial uses.

The Justice Department’s National Incidence Study reported that 1.7 million children run away or are turned away from their homes each year, with just 357,600 reported as missing to the police.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimates that at least 100,000 children are caught up in the insidious world of child prostitution each year: 55% of street girls engage in prostitution; 75% of those work for a pimp.

Close to Home

Do not think that this is a crime in the big cities or large population centers of America. These trafficking networks exist in communities throughout the CNH District. While prostitution is legal in Nevada, this does not mean an 18 year old enticed by a pimp into this demonic business is acting in her own best interests. Nor does it mean she wasn’t illegally trafficked before she turned 18 and is only made public once she is no longer a minor (this is what occurs throughout the United States). Most adult prostitutes were forced into this work while still a minor.

The nature of these networks hit very close to home recently. One of my staff members was called to do service on a grand jury in our community. The crime the jury analyzed? A sex-trafficking network, where girls as young as fourteen were being kidnapped (even from popular shopping centers during daylight) and forced into sex trafficking in our city. This pimp’s residence was within a quarter mile of our church’s location, basically
in our neighborhood. Perhaps the most disturbing detail from this case was the pimp that was to go to trial had sent a young woman into a local church’s youth group to find girls they would target for their business! I thank God that the evidence in this case was strong enough to take to trial where this pimp and some of his accomplices were convicted of their crimes.

How could a pimp use a girl to infiltrate a youth group and drag other unsuspecting victims into this horror? One has to understand that pimps and other exploiters of minors know how to find the people in a crowd who often won’t be missed. Many girls forced into the sex trafficking industry are foster children or “runaways” that slip through the cracks of our systems. The evil people leading this modern slave industry are adept at seeking these girls out, then use drugs and violence and twisted psychological warfare/tactics to create dependence, obedience, and submission. They simply do not care that means these girls are being sold ten to thirty times a day for as long as they are trapped in this industry. I have personally known young girls in the foster care system that run away, are forced into this industry, then are brought back into the foster care system only to be lured away again by their “boyfriend” (i.e. pimp).

What Can Be Done?

I believe there is hope for the lost and broken of this world. The stories of Christ bringing healing to the prostitutes, the lepers, the unclean of his time give me the hope that the church today can bring a change in attitude to our culture and cast down this modern day slavery just as Christians were instrumental in ending slavery in the time of William Wilberforce in the British Empire and our own nation’s slavery in the 1860s.

I hardly need to mention, though I will anyway, that we as leaders in the church need to change our attitudes toward the victims of this crime (and dare I say, the consumers and perpetrators of this crime). Rather than looking with disdain at that young woman walking down the street dressed like a prostitute, we instead need to see one of God’s creatures, formed in His image, being destroyed by her own sin and the sin of others against her. Sexual crimes are one of the most heinous against us, as they impact the body, mind, and soul in such deep and intricate ways. We need to recognize they are victims, even when they do not act as if they are (as is far too common), and begin to offer the compassion Christ offered to those caught in similar circumstances in His day.

We can begin by equipping ourselves and our congregations to understand the nature of this crime in order to recognize the victims and perpetrators of this crime. As usual, there is a mountain of information about this criminal industry on the internet, as well as plenty of organizations working to raise awareness, bring an end to this evil, and rehabilitate the victims rescued from this industry. In the Sacramento area, Courage Worldwide works to raise awareness through seminars, benefit concerts, training, and other activities. Courage Worldwide also recently opened “Courage House,” a home built to house young women rescued from sex trafficking. This is one of a few homes in the entire nation operating with this purpose. They have many opportunities for volunteering in their organization.

Churches can contact local law enforcement to understand the gravity of this crime in their area and what can be done to help law enforcement care for the victims of this crime. Most cities and counties have no place to take a girl who is a victim of sex trafficking, and many of these girls are simply left to leave the scene (and then they are typically scooped up by the pimp or his accomplice), or taken to the local juvenile hall (again where they are scooped up when they are discharged from this facility). Contacting the chaplain of your local juvenile hall and volunteering your
time at the juvenile hall is a powerful way to bring compassion and caring to the victims of this crime.

I highly recommend contacting Courage Worldwide and finding out how you can partner with them to offer a Faith in Crisis Academy. This training will open your people’s eyes to the nature of this crime and the needs of those who have gone through this trauma. Those who undergo this training can be trusted to stand by those who have experienced other kinds of trauma as well, as the training is basically training for chaplains responding to moments of crisis in the community. The person who developed this training developed it in the aftermath of 9/11/01 to equip the chaplains and pastors offering support to those traumatized by the attack against the World Trade Center in New York City.

Congregations can also encourage their members to begin foster care of children or investing in the lives of children in the foster care system. Clearly this is not a step to be taken lightly but this is a “preventative” measure as so many foster children are taken or lured from their foster homes or enticed to “run away” to enter this industry. These are the ones who can be so easily led astray that I believe we are called to care for and love as Christ loves us. Adults willing to invest in the lives of foster youth, either by becoming a foster parent or getting involved with the young people (especially girls) can help prevent these young women from slipping through the cracks and disappearing into this industry.

Courage Worldwide also suggests that churches can rent or buy homes that can then become safe houses for women 18 and over who have been rescued from or are fleeing from sex trafficking. There are many regulations that must be maneuvered around to open a home for minors in California, but it is much simpler to open a home for adults. This certainly is no easy task, but some of our congregations may very well feel the call to engage in this ministry for their communities.

I encourage you and your people to become informed about this horrendous crime that is plaguing our world, and even our local communities, today. The compassion that will be necessary to serve the victims of this crime has already been offered to us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He can equip us to begin powerful ministries of healing and restoration through those called to serve the least of these. God bless you and embolden you for this work if the Spirit leads you to do so.

Information for this article was taken from:

Faith in Crisis Academy Workbook developed by Law Enforcement Chaplaincy-Sacramento.

www.FBI.gov
www.courageworldwide.org

Rev. Dan Deuel has been pastor of St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Stockton, CA for over six years. You are welcome to contact him at 209-957-8750 for further information.
“Play it Off the Wall”

Rev. Jon Coyne

The other day I was indulging in a guilty pleasure, staring at the newest and biggest television at Costco, with the kind of stare usually reserved for fine art or nature’s beauty. Ninety inches of glorious television enveloped my brain, calling for my credit card, before my dear wife brought me back to reality, “It will not fit in our house!” Blinking back to reality, I was faced with the continuing battle to purchase what my family needs, while navigating the pantheon of fantasy wants and wishes that seemed to surround me at Costco. The rich irony of walking through a bare warehouse, while being tempted with every manor of luxury, was not lost on my personal battle against out of control consumerism.

Congregations, as groups of sinners who are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus, are often tempted by similar moments of our consumer driven culture. Jesus has called us to a shared ministry of sacrifice, using our resources of time, talent and treasure to bring the message of salvation to all people, some of whom reject our message and reject us, just as Jesus was rejected. Between the temptations of consumerism and the desire to avoid rejection, congregations are often swayed by a subtle group of concerns that work against sacrificial, missional work. These concerns are magnified by the impact of our culture – a post church society where congregations are facing lagging attendance, lower offerings, and general antipathy from the public toward the institution of the church. Some of these subtle concerns are:

1) As a congregation we need to focus on our needs – physical plant, the structure of our bylaws, and internal programs like youth, music, or worship style. We need to focus on our people and that does not really include other people outside of our congregation.

2) The budget is tight so Mission dollars need to be cut... both to the district and to our own outreach because we cannot afford what we, as church need.

3) We protect the assets which are left. Bank accounts are protected, decisions about the work people will do is protected and our plans become more and more focused on ourselves in order to protect what we have left.

4) Finally, a subtle form of the media message creeps in as congregations begin to wrestle with and argue about what form of the message is appealing to others and to themselves. Churches often miss the fact that our message and actions must be counter-cultural, while still engaging people with the Good News of Jesus. Here we find the stumbling block consumers have toward the Gospel…it is not about what we pay for, but what God has given us for free that brings us peace.

When I arrived at Bethany Lutheran Church in Menlo Park, we were facing the concerns of attendance, income, and reputation in our
Looking back, I remember a conversation with Rev. Eugene Gruell that helped me push the envelope for our mission work. Pastor Gruell’s father was a missionary to Cuba before the change to communism. Pastor Gruell himself, was the mission executive for years in the Texas District. Now he was chairing the Hispanic Ministry Task Force in the C-N-H district. I was struggling with our continued support for a Spanish language mission in our congregation. Bethany had embraced the new mission, but now small groups of the flourishing mission start were moving to other parts of California and I did not know what I should do. Pastor Gene looked at me and with a twinkle in his eye said, “You know what to do. Do what you always have to do with mission work. Play it off the wall. God is in charge and you just respond.” Here are the ways that Bethany has been “playing it off the wall” for the past seventeen years.

Yo No Habla Espanol

I do not speak Spanish. In fact, I did not take Spanish in high school or college. I actually had to ask a Spanish speaker for the correct words for this subtitle! Yet, six months into my time at Bethany, a Spanish speaking pastor walked in to my office and asked to rent space for his church. A little history is important. I spent the first six months at Bethany explaining to the congregation that if I wanted to be in charge of rentals, I would have stayed in Real Estate. Like many congregations, we were renting space to groups, but there was little if any relationship and ministry with these groups. We were embarking on a journey which would lead from renting preschool rooms to building our own preschool in order to bring the message of Jesus to children. We were ending our rentals to support groups and beginning our support of music for children, enhanced seniors ministry, and annual speaker presentations for free in the community. So REALLY, this guy wants me to rent him space?

One of the best phone calls I ever made was to Rev. Ted Iverson. I shared with him the situation and asked for his advice. He counseled me to follow my intentions, but also be open to the mission by giving them the space for free and partnering with the new congregation. I almost got it right, but fearing the tight budget, we hedged and took 60% of the offered rental amount, which I rationalized was fair because it was about 15% of market value, but we did work on our partnership. Before long, the rent was removed because God had blessed both our finances and our relationship! My only regret was hedging, but we still had taken the risk, played it off the wall, and those choices and blessing had led to the conversation with Pastor Gene about the future of Spanish language ministry.

PAMS

The Peninsula Asian Mission Society began as an effort by Circuit 8 to begin a new mission plant on the Peninsula for one or more Asian cultures. The first money for this effort came from a Synod grant and was used to fund the seminal work of Pastor Terry Chan. However, after a year of our mutual efforts, there was great uncertainty for PAMS and a call for Pastor Terry to
Grace and Bethel in San Francisco. As we continued our efforts the major point of discussion was which would come first, the worker or the funding. A few months into our discussion, I approached Pastor Dave Chan about the mission. Meanwhile, First Home of Christ, a Chinese church in Menlo Park asked Bethany to rent space for a 15-18 month period of time while they renovated their facilities. Why did God send these people and why would I even consider the rental? During an intense four week period of time Bethany members committed over $150,000 including most of the rent money to help our new Chinese mission for the next three years. Coupled with the support of all PAMS congregations, we were able to call Pastor David.

The story would be “off the wall” enough if it ended with a mission plant on the Peninsula, but God had other plans. After another 18 months of work, Pastor Dave had the opportunity to share the Gospel with some Chinese speaking people who came to the Food Pantry at Grace and Bethel, of all places. His work was blessed and this group grew to over 150 people, ultimately beginning a new worship service on September 9, 2012. PAMS handed the ministry over to the new church, Christ for All Nations and in the end Pastor Terry and Pastor Dave were both involved in many new ministries, including the Chinese language mission.

**Burning Bush**

The next “off the wall” opportunity arrived in the form of Pastor Tom Norris, editor of this e-zine. Pastor Tom wanted to dedicate his ministry to reaching people with the message of Jesus Christ through various forms of electronic communication. Bethany partnered with the district to allow Pastor Tom the time to develop an online radio station, a format for online Bible Study and a way for congregations to replicate our communication system which includes an intentional web presence with various means of communicating to people who are already part of our community and lots of people who were not expecting to be part of our community.

Many people have asked if we are making money through Project Burning Bush. The reality is I never anticipated this question because we are dedicating so many financial resources to this project. First, we had to develop the modes of communicating through the internet. Then we had to source the people who would create the model for communication and be willing to serve others. Now, we are looking for partner congregations and content providers. We have been able to use our resources to benefit other congregations and provide services which would cost much more to replicate. God has blessed this effort as congregations are gaining a “communications team” through Project Burning Bush.

**Playing it off the wall**

Each time one of these missional opportunities arrives “in our laps” both the congregation and I have to make hard choices. Often my first, sinful inclination is to wonder how much of my time and how many of my congregational resources will be needed. It is so easy to insert the word “my” before congregational resources, when really the words is always “God’s”! The amazing reality is that every time we commit to the mission of Jesus Christ we have been blessed with the time, talent and treasure resources that God has in mind for the path God is creating for the mission. Do I get worried, frightened, and anxious “playing it off the wall”? YES I DO! However, the God of peace continues to send messengers, who like the angels say, “Fear not!” Those messengers always remind me of the sainted Rev. Eugene Gruell, who brought me the message of peace and stilled my soul on the missional path when he said, “You know what to do. Play it off the wall.”

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Leonard Sweet has often referred to the Post-Churched world in which we live as the “Perfect Storm”. And like the early disciples on Lake Galilee, this storm has really rocked our Christian boat. At least that’s the word I’ve heard from every church or church agency with which I’ve discussed these things in recent years. When our boat is rocked we—Christ’s crew—are thrown off balance. As unsettling as that is initially, we know that the Holy Spirit uses our “imbalance” to cause us to shift our weight away from our “Churched-culture” understandings and toward the heart and mind of our Savior. Christ’s Church has always developed better balance when His Spirit “rocked the boat”, that is, challenged the ruling assumptions, patterns, and paradigms in which the Church became entrenched during periods of seeming calm and control. Even a cursory read of the church’s story from Biblical days until now reveals the Spirit’s “rocking” His Church over and over again, in order for it to regain its true balance in Christ.

One of the most significant challenges to our Christ-centered balance these days is the ability to minister to those not “churched” while also serving those of the household of God. In the “Churched world” era we were able to serve both groups through a ministry centered primarily in the local church. The churched and unchurched lived in single world in which the church played an essential role. General society appreciated and supported the fact that the church was the “go-to” place to address spiritual, emotional, and even physical needs. The Post-Churched era, however, has pushed the churched and unchurched into worlds of their own in which there is little if any real intersection any more. Trying to serve faithfully in both worlds, therefore, is more competitive than complimentary, placing almost impossible demands on our time, energy, and financial resources. We’re thrown off balance.

This dilemma is not new. Maintaining ministry balance was a serious problem already in the first century church. St. Luke records that the Gospel ministry in Jerusalem was really humming along until St. Peter and the other apostles discovered that they had begun to neglect their evangelistic calling. Luke writes, “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’” We usually quote this passage in our own church contexts as proof that our pastors should keep out of the kitchen and stay in the pulpit. That is, the temporal affairs of the church need to be the focus of our faithful laymen and women, while pastors focus on the ministry of the Gospel to their gathered flock. Interestingly, the focus of the Apostles’ ministry at this point was not as much on the already gathered as it was on the not yet gathered. To this point in the story, Luke records only the preaching ministry of the Apostles that took place among the unbelieving Jewish people. That’s what was getting them into trouble, even thrown into jail. (Granted, we’ve probably heard some sermons in our churches that should have jailed the preacher, however, that’s not the case here.) The Apostles were “troubling” the authorities for preaching to the “lost” not the found, and it was that ministry of the Word that was being jeopardized by the growing ministry needs of the saints.

Following the Apostles’ advice, the church elected seven men “of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom” who were assigned oversight of the ministry to widows. The dilemma was solved. The church began to hit on all eight cylinders again, but not for long. Within a few months, the church’s boat was severely rocked by the murder of one of those seven—the beloved St. Stephan. With his death a great persecution arose against the church and many men and women were forced to scatter from Jerusalem to the regions of Judea and Samaria, and most likely for many, to their homes of origin in the greater Roman Empire (Acts 2:5, 9-11). Even though Jesus had
already instructed His disciples that Jerusalem was to be the launching pad, not the destination of His Gospel ministry. (Acts 1:6-8) this “scattering” of the saints threw the church off balance again. In so doing, it enabled the church to shift its Gospel weight in the direction of the world, realigning its ministry with the will of their Lord.

We must pause briefly to take a closer look at St. Luke’s use of the word “scatter” in this context (Acts 8:1-5). In contrast to other verbs he used elsewhere (Acts 5:35-39), Luke chose to describe the great dispersion of the saints with the word “διεσπάρησαν” from “διασπέρω” from which we derive the English word Diaspora. Dia (meaning through or out) is combined with sperein or spora (seed) to form the word we translate as “scatter.” The scattering of God’s people described here is best understood proactively, that is, God scattering His Life-giving Seed (the Gospel) in the world, in the same way that a sower scatters seed in his field in order to produce a harvest. Luke makes this very point as he continues the story, “Now those [men and women] who were scattered went about proclaiming the word.”

St. Luke continues the story of the scattering church a few chapters later (Acts 11) as those who fled the persecution in Jerusalem made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. But he provides a two-chapter interlude (chapters nine and ten) in the narrative in order to describe the Holy Spirit’s rocking the church’s boat yet again. It begins with Peter and John as they witnessed the Holy Spirit pour Himself out on Samaritan believers as they (Jews) touched (laid hands upon) the unclean (Samaritans) (Acts 8:14-17). It culminates with the Holy Spirit pouring Himself out on Gentile men and women whom Jesus sent Peter to evangelize. Peter’s experience threw the Jewish believers in Jerusalem off balance, which provided the necessary opportunity to be re-balanced by God’s Word. Peter explained, “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” He concluded, “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” The net result was the Jerusalem church glorifying God that He granted salvation even to the Gentiles. These two experiences set the stage for the Holy Spirit’s next great move.

The scattering of Christ’s people that transpired from the death of St. Stephen carried the Gospel as far as Antioch. To this point, the Gospel traveled for most part “accidentally” that is, as Christians naturally returned to their homes of origin somewhere in the Empire. Now, the Holy Spirit makes the Gospel’s global itinerary a deliberate affair as He instructs the church in Antioch to set apart two of its “prophets and teachers” specifically for ministry to those who have not yet heard the Good News. Note the Spirit’s words and the church’s response: While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Selucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus (Acts 13). This direct action by the Holy Spirit inaugurated St. Paul’s “missionary band” that led Christ’s missionary enterprise for the next several years as recorded in the succeeding chapters of Acts. Four verbs are instructive in this narrative (see bolded words above): 1) Set apart (ἀφορίζω), meaning to rail off, or separate; 2) Call (prokaléw), meaning to summon to oneself, in this case for official business; 3) Sent them off (ἀπολύω) meaning to release from all obligation, divorce. The word is also used for “forgive” that is, to release from all debt without any future obligation; and 4) Sent out (ἐκπέμπω), meaning to send out with purpose. Important to note is that the Holy Spirit, not the church at Antioch (as so many of our English translations tend to suggest), is the actual sender. The church was asked by the Spirit to release Barnabas and Saul (Paul) from all Gospel ministry obligations to it in order that they be fully dedicated the Gospel ministry to those who had not yet heard. In this way the Holy Spirit maintained Divine balance between the Gospel ministry to Christ’s church and to His world.

The New Testament suggests that other believers joined St. Barnabas and St. Paul in this Gospel ministry to the world. The word “Apostle” is normally reserved for the Twelve personally chosen by our Lord as His eyewitnesses (the eleven, plus Matthias, plus Paul). However, the word is also applied to men and women associated with St. Paul’s missionary service. St. Luke refers to both Paul and Barnabas as apostles: But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul . . . (Acts 14). In his letter to the Corinthian Christians St. Paul references Titus and others as apostles: As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are apostles of the churches, the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 8). He does the same for Epaphroditus: I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your apostle and
minister to my need . . . (Philippians 2). In a somewhat controversial passage Paul commends a husband and wife as “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16). In regard to Titus (as well as Timothy) we offer a slight corrective to the idea that these men were primarily the pastors of specific congregations. Indeed, the focus of Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus are pastoral and we generally refer them as the “Pastoral Epistles.” There is no question that these two men served “ pastorally” in the congregations at Ephesus and Crete. However, they were not dispatched by St. Paul to serve as the called pastors of those churches, but to set in place the pastoral ministry in those congregations (an apostolic or missionary function). Once their missions were completed they were to return to St. Paul for further apostolic assignments.

We gain real encouragement from reading how the early church lost, regained, and maintained a Christ-centered balance between Gospel outreach to the churched and unchurched. While not prescriptive for our times, a few insights may prove helpful to our own challenges to find and keep Gospel balance in our time and place. First, the weight of ministry in the early church consistently shifted toward ministry to the already gathered Christians. That should neither surprise nor disappoint us. It’s actually normal. The needs of loved ones within our households naturally beg and receive our attention more than those outside. St. Paul even affirms that reality when he instructed the Galatians, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6). At the same time, the early church self-corrected when ministry “imbalance” toward the church eclipsed the Gospel ministry to the world (Acts 6).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit personally assisted the early church in regaining and maintaining a Christ-centered balance. The Book of Acts opens with the disciples quite confused about the scope and focus of Christ’s Kingdom. They assumed that it was synonymous with Israel, not the world. The Lord was not put off by their confusion. He promised that they would be His witnesses both to Israel and the other nations and He sent His Spirit to them to make it happen. The Holy Spirit filled St. Stephan enabling him to explain that God was not exclusively bound to the Temple nor was He the personal property of Israel. The entire world was His dwelling place and He intended Israel (Abraham’s children) to be a blessing to all the nations (Acts 7). Stephan’s sermon and consequent martyrdom scattered the early Christians from Jerusalem to “Judea, and Samaria, and the ends of the earth,” just as Jesus had promised (Acts 8). The Holy Spirit personally intervened in the Gospel proclamation to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10) to bear witness to the Jewish believers that these non-Jewish believers were full citizens of Christ’s Kingdom and full partners with them in the ministry of the Gospel to the world (Acts 11). These were great teaching moments for the church!

Finally, the Holy Spirit deliberately set aside Barnabas and Saul to proclaim the Gospel to those still outside the church (Acts 13). Up to that point, Gospel outreach to the unchurched (Jewish people who had not yet heard the Gospel) took place informally and “accidentally” as Jewish Christians scattered across the Roman Empire. The Holy Spirit became quite deliberate, however, with the call of Barnabas and Saul. Just as He specifically called “overseers, to care for the church of God” (Acts 20), He specifically called missionaries to evangelize those outside the church. He personally guaranteed a Christ-centered balance within the Gospel ministry.

Lutheran theology rightly upholds the “Office of the Gospel Ministry” or preaching office as something
instituted by God Himself. Our teaching underscores the Gospel heart of our God, who is wholly dedicated to the ministry of reconciling His estranged world with Himself (2 Corinthians 5). In our rite of Ordination, we cite our Lord’s own words as institutional for the “Office of Public Ministry,” through which He continues to proclaim the Gospel to the nations.

Jesus came and spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28)

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be to you! As the Father sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20)

Assuming the institutional nature of our Lord’s Words, we must pay close attention both to the purpose of His ministry—reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins—and its intended recipients—the entire world.

Given the churched world in which we Christians in Europe and America have been privileged to proclaim the Gospel for the last several centuries it is no wonder that the focus of our Gospel ministry has been the church. Consider the list of duties to which we ask pastors to commit when they are ordained.

Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent . . . ? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living? (LSB Agenda)

Again, this church focus should neither surprise nor disappoint us given the fact that for centuries the unchurched were drawn to the church as an essential institution of the culture and society. Gospel proclamation to the churched and unchurched could remain balanced through ministry conducted within the church. The imbalance comes when the church no longer plays an essential role in the society but Christians continue to organize their Gospel proclamation as if it does.

Here the Holy Spirit’s deliberateness in establishing a missionary office in the early church may be instructive. He requested that the church at Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul from their regular congregational duties of preaching and teaching in order to be sent by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach those beyond earshot of the church who had not yet heard the Gospel. Does this missionary office have significance
in our day? If so, what would it look like in the LCMS? How would it function? How would it interface with local congregations and synodical structures? This last question is especially challenging for us in the LCMS who know no structure other than or outside of the local congregation that the Holy Spirit employs for communicating the Gospel to the unchurched. These questions may challenge us and in so doing the Holy Spirit will again rock His church, but as is His intention, only for the purpose of us regaining our true balance in Christ.

Notes...

1. Jesus already pointed His disciples to this Kingdom reality in his early parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13). In His explanation He stated, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.” The Lord concludes His explanation with a paraphrase of Daniel 12:3, an intentional reference to the “Diaspora” of God’s people in Babylon centuries earlier.

2. Our Lord taught that there are three essential components to the mission His Father gave to Him: He must suffer, rise from the dead, and proclaim the Gospel to all the nations (Luke 24). St Paul affirms these three components in his testimony before King Agrippa, “[I say] nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26).

3. In Matthew 28, Jesus directs His Gospel ministry to “all the nations.” In John 20 he declares that He is sending His disciples for the same purpose for which the Father sent Him. (John earlier recorded our Lord’s statement that the Father “[sent] His Son into the world” not to condemn it but to save it, John 3.) His Words to the disciples, “As the Father sent me, I also send you” can be properly understood only in the context of the entire world.

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