

CHAPTER 5 – THE CHURCH’S ACTIVE ROLE IN THE CHRISTIAN MISSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is obvious that accomplishing the Christian mission is a progressing enterprise; it is not accomplished all at once. In this chapter, we will identify some components for the Church to observe in order for growth and maturity to take place. It is crucial for the Church to understand the sending process from a Biblical perspective – as this is the call to obedience. Discipleship also has a major role to play in this regard. Coupled with the above, effective teaching is imperative. If the “mission field” does not become the “church field”, and again the outworking onto the “mission field”, then effective teaching may not have taken place.

2. THE WITNESS OF ALL CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD

A functional church which has engaged in every-member ministry where each member knows and understands their giftedness will also be involved in the world and be concerned to do what is good and right for others. When the laity of the local church understand that each are to be involved in ministry in the world, all the time, poverty and social injustices will not go unnoticed. Any voice of need in society will be addressed.

The church is a community gathered to be sent out to the world. Community entails an understanding of the church as sacrament to the world. The church does not exist for itself but to continue God’s work in the world (Foley 1986:52).

It is strongly acknowledged that a change needs to take place in the church structure before there can be a significant impact outside of the church. As we get together as a “family of God” – speaking together in love, men and women, of all cultures – our eyes and ears will be opened to the needs of those around us.

Care can be displayed in many different ways. What is needed is local churches – made up of people – that desire nothing more than to love and to serve God and allow the Lordship of Christ to be displayed in a corporate lifestyle. There is a desire to not only seek the best for the Body of Christ but also seeking the best for the people who are around.

When Christians fail to do good and serve the world, the witness is deafening. Essentially what is being said is that there is no concern for people and society. It is a choice to basically disobey God's commands in the world.

God expects His people to live righteously and this includes what *is* done and not merely what *is not* done. Active participation in the Kingdom of God leads to active participation in the world in areas such as forgiveness and generosity. Congar adds to this by saying,

The Christian's position as God's faithful servant in the world makes two principal demands, corresponding respectively to an aspect of detachment or transcendence and one of engagement or immanence (1985:433).

Running through the Bible are expressions of God's concern for the poor and the afflicted. The ministry of Jesus evidenced compassion for persons in their physical as well as spiritual needs. Christian's are their brothers' keeper and they are to love their neighbour. The ministry in the world requires witness and

work. It needs to always be remembered that souls have bodies and that the whole person is to be ministered to.

Caring for the neighbour in need applies to more than persons who live next door or across the street. Deeds of kindness are to be directed toward those persons who are in need of assistance – wherever they might be in the world. In our day, persons who live great distances from us become our neighbours as news and media or other forms of communication make us aware of these needs. A known need triggers a response in the lives of concerned persons.

This was true in the early Church where we find Gentile Christians sharing their limited resources for the relief of Jewish Christians. As the Church grew, it cared for the needs of all persons, even those outside of the immediate circles of fellowship.

Again and again the Gospels record the Lord's compassion and action when He encountered persons with needs. We live in a world that is gripped in selfishness and we often conform to the ways of self-centered humanity rather than take on the ways of the new person in Christ with the renewal of our minds to do the will of God.

There are neighbours in the community God would have us help. The Church (people) should be sharing food, clothes and medicines with needy persons in the community. However, physical needs are not the only kind of help needed. Let us consider the emotional burdens of parents of the retarded child, the frustration of the woman whose husband left her, the widow or widower, the alcoholic, the teen rebel, the school drop-out, and the family of the young man who gave his life up in battle. The aged, the unemployed, the crippled, the lonely, the status-seeking person in the rat-race of weekdays and weekends are all people in need and opportunities for God's people to reach out to. Heartache and genuine need are all around us, but we are blind to these needs or

disobedient to God's call to ministries of assistance. The church is not helpless in the face of complex and social problems and is able to do something to help people as we move through life.

Genuine care can be a form of pre-evangelism, but whether or not people will relate to the Lord in whose name we offer them assistance.

Motives for serving society are varied. Among these are concern for the needy, obedience to the direct commands of God, and a realisation that God is being served when help is given to a needy human being. Doing good and serving others is a way the laity could contribute to the society and the world they live in.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

We have already stated that it is Christ Who builds His Church. He does this by giving to people His own life through the new birth, as they respond to Him in repentance, faith and obedience. By virtue of the relationship of the Lord to His people they become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and therefore they live lives based on Kingdom principles.

It is through the church, which is "Bible-based" and "world-faced" that the ministry of Christ in the world must take place. Since there is no favouritism with God and since all people stand before Him as sinners and all those who have been born again, according to Jn 3:3, have come into Christ through His giving of Himself for them there is no place for pride in the heart of a disciple of Christ (2 Cor 10:17,18).

The higher gifts are not given to a person for their own use, but are given to the church for the purpose of building up the body to do the work of the ministry. These teaching gifts are given by the Head of the church so that they may teach

the Word as the Holy Spirit, who moved men to write it down, helps them to understand the mind of God, so that what is understood is spiritually discerned. Each believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit for the particular work the Lord has prepared for each one of His disciples and so in the case of those gifted to teach in these capacities, it is their particular ministry in the body, to teach.

These gifted teachers like all the other members of the church, also have needs, are also struggling with their own sinfulness and so they too must belong in a small shepherding group where they along with the other disciples of Christ can be brought to maturity in Christ as together all in the group are free to express experiences, conflicts, joys, needs, encouragement and where responsibility and care for each other is brought about through interaction. It is in this context that the many “one-another” commands of the New Testament can operate. Needs are met as together we encourage each other through the application of the Word of God, as we learn to pray together, as we learn to spur one another on to good works and all this in an attitude of love.

The elders and deacons are to lead the church with an attitude of servanthood. The idea of submission of the elders to the teaching gifts is to be seen not as an act of “lower office” to a “superior position,” but rather as a submission of the elders and deacons to the Word of God, which is the authority for life and practice. The teaching team and the eldership team should exhibit in the church an attitude of submission to each other out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). Without this type of example set, it will just be a matter of time before a hierarchical (secular) type of leadership develops, where Christ will not be honoured as the only Head of the local church.

When people who have been shepherded in the small groups by caring elders, gather together in the larger body of believers, the fellowship learned in the smaller groups will enhance the fellowship and worship and prayer of the congregation of believers. As these believers come together in the Body to

worship the Lord in prayer, in praises, in song, in giving, in communion, in baptizing of new disciples of Christ, and as they gather together to be instructed more formally in the Word of God, by those with the spiritual gift of teaching, the people in the different groups will be able to feed into the lives of each other and so minister to those in other groups according to the several gifts which Christ has given to the Body, so that it might be healthy and alive, a Church fulfilling its calling both locally and globally. The larger Church consisting of all the small groups, will possess more gifts to enable it to meet the various needs within the Body. Also, needs in the community may more easily be met as the gathered church becomes aware of them.

The church structured to meet peoples' needs in a shepherding/teaching ministry, will, through these various ministries, be "growing people" who are concerned for people. Missionaries who have this church life experience will go out from such churches to plant new churches in other cultures which will also be true to the Biblical pattern, that is, churches whose members are concerned for people.

Being part of the Body of Christ, each person, no matter what his giftedness and ministry, is to serve the Lord of the Church. Each is responsible to obey Jesus as Lord. He is the Head of the body, His Church. When the church responsibly allows the spiritual gifts to inform it concerning the will of God as revealed in Scripture, it will recognise those with the qualities of shepherds/elders, so that those gifted to teach and those who qualify as elders may guide the whole local Body to do the work of the ministry, so that, in unity and love, they may grow up in Christ, together.

Local churches growing in this way will make an impact for and in Christ, in their own membership, their own families, their own communities and on into the wider world as their own members become "world Christians" in their thinking, in their life – style and so they will train "missionary-minded" people who will reflect their

missionary minded Lord's concern for His world, in both thought and action. Churches built in this way will eventually send their own members out as missionaries to plant churches in other cultures which will also regard the Lord Jesus Christ as their Head and recognise that they too must be "lights" in their own communities and continue with the Christian mission as they eventually send out their own members as missionaries.

4. NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR THE LAITY (Missional Member Ministry – MMM)

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen tremendous social changes. After World War II the process of secularization gained momentum, urbanization proceeded rapidly and the world became much smaller because of improved communication. The church forfeited much of its significance and authority in society. This prompted reflection on ecclesiastic structures as well as the position of members, both within the church and in society. One even hears talk of a second reformation:

"We are in the midst of a second reformation. The first had to do with getting the Scriptures into the hands of the laity. This one has to do with getting the ministry into the hands of the laity"
(Henrichsen & Garrison 1983:9).

A significant gain is that church members have been set free from their position of passive dependence and are now permitted an independent position of their own. One could almost call it a revolution, the difference being that this is not a mere reversal of roles but the emergence of a completely new relationship between clergy and congregation. Each has its own distinctive contribution to make to the life of the church and the expansion of God's kingdom in the world. In order to clarify the position of church members and clergy in relation to

one another, Paul uses the image of the body of Christ – 1 Cor 12. Being Christ's body, believers are linked in a special way. The bond between them is not accentuated primarily by the image of a body, but by the fact they are the body of Christ. The church's bond with Christ creates a bond between its members (Ridderbos 1975:414, 415). Those who belong to Christ belong to one another. But this does not mean that the image of the body should not be used to portray the bond that unites believers.

With the above in mind, the church does not exist for its own sake. It is sent to serve the world and recreate it so that it may once again be the kingdom of God. The church may and should be occupied with itself. In Paul's letters he is continually admonishing, training, equipping strengthening and guiding churches to spiritual maturity. Such up-building is not the ultimate goal; believers are equipped in order to conduct their ministry in the world. The church are the called out ones who are laden with the fruit of the Holy Spirit ready to disperse love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gl 5:22, 23). The church cannot accomplish this witness and ministry to the world through its formal structures. It is the task of its members. The church as a formal organization sometimes pronounces on ethical or other topical issues, and sometimes takes part in negotiations; but the actual task of witness and ministry are performed by its members. They are God's representatives in the world. They live and work in the world, are part of its decision-making processes and move in all its inner circles. This is where believers act as witnesses of Christ and render service in His name.

In the past such witness was understood to consist in talking to people about their personal relationship to Jesus Christ; service was seen in the same context. Naturally this is important. But witness and service encompass far more than just reaching out to individuals and creating personal relationships with Christ. Christians have a duty to introduce a religious perspective into decision-making processes. Christians do not have their own rules for the economy, agriculture,

scientific work, medicine, the law and all the rest. Decisions should be taken according to the established rules of a particular sector. But this does not preclude the introduction of a religious perspective. Concepts such as justice, love, peace, humaneness, respect, equity, service and care are all religiously laden.

5. THE FOURFOLD CHALLENGE OF MISSIONS AT THE START OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

When looking forward to the challenges faced by the Church, one sees that faith in Christ makes the doctrine of the Church a foundational truth of the Gospel. The Church refers primarily to local churches whose congregating is to visualize, image, what Christ is like. Christ speaks, therefore the Church is characterized by teaching the Scriptures – Kerygma (Κήρυγμα). There is an openness to be taught by abiding in God’s Word and by seeking the higher gifts. Teachers with spiritual gifts emerge and through Christ’s love, the church is characterized by fellowship – Koinonia (Κοινωνία) – and love for one another is created. Elders begin to pastor, care and disciple. In this process, Christ ministers and therefore the church is characterized by service to the whole person – Diakonia (Διακονία). These ministries are lead by Deacons who love the Lord and are committed to seeing His Hand at work in people’s lives. This is done as an act of worship to God – Leitourgia (Λειτουργία).

Most Christians know little other than Christ had twelve disciples and that He commissioned these men to make disciples of all nations. But just what is a 21st -century disciple and how do you go about becoming one? In a world of scepticism, one is left behind with little ground for hope or vision. We are left only with ourselves, our own lives. There is no common good to be searched for; we have only personal preference to guide us. The isolated individual is left only with the struggle for self-fulfilment as we hire a new generation of counsellors to soothe us through our demise.

Can one try and find something positive amidst the wreckage. Through discipleship, Christianity is always holding on to what is good and yet reforming itself around a fuller vision. Christianity claims that a discipleship that is understood can provide purpose for us as humans, yet a purpose that does not cage us in, or deny our individuality, but rather opens us up to creatively seek new solutions, solutions that create and excite.

Discipleship has to do with holistic ministry – a service that engages the whole person. Discipleship involves itself with an incarnational approach – a “ministry of presence”. People who decide to serve in this way are determined to make themselves available to people on a significant level. Incarnational ministry presents a challenge. It is easy to sit and debate the effectiveness of time limits on welfare or whether certain people deserve help or not. You do not incur much risk when you lash out those who are hurting and are vulnerable. However, it is more difficult to care by coming alongside a person. Yet, people are more likely to change when a caring person works with them instead of remaining far removed from their problems. Lawmakers can have some impact on people’s problems, but it is usually from a distance. Caring Christians have the ultimate impact because they get close enough to bring change – this is discipleship!

Discipleship is something people do to other people. Men and women are not, on the whole, converted by texts pushed under their doors or messages on the Internet; they are converted by others who share the Good News with them. And of course, for sharing to take place, means that there has to be a presence.

The Church has experienced great problems of late, because of the limited number of ordained ministers who are available for community work. As a result, the untrained (laity) are being obliged to take over some of the duties of the ordained ministers. This has resulted in a shift of emphasis to lay ministries in the organised congregation. Through discipleship, the laity can work side by side

with the ordained ministers to live in the secular worlds as believers. The unique role of the laity is that they can carry the gospel into their life-worlds – their families, working environment, social and church life.

Many South African churches have made good progress towards incorporating lay members in the ministry of their local churches and equipping them for service to the world. Other churches and congregations take a more traditional view, leaving all spiritual responsibility in the hands of the ordained ministers.

Recent developments have done much to promote greater lay involvement in the work of the Church. More and more emphasis is being laid on the equality of all believers. Also, in many circumstances of discipleship, ordained ministers are unmarried, and therefore somewhat isolated from social problems. Lay members can contribute in many areas – family life, sexuality, injustice, racism, the role of women in spirituality and Church life, technology, ecology, and so forth. Lay people know what is going on in the real world and what the problems are.

More recently, there seems to be a willingness of the laity to be involved. There is a whole range of possibilities that seem to be emerging where lay members are prepared to join clerical leaders in formulating questions and considering the role of the laity in congregations and their contribution to the life of the church. It is no longer the trained theologians only who ponder the implications of discipleship: a wider spectrum of lay Christians are involved in the same task. Both trained and untrained are prepared to reevaluate the church, to consider what it really is, and both are prepared to jettison some of the ancient ecclesiastical baggage. There is, more and more, the desired relationship of “co-responsibility”. One might also describe it as teamwork.

Because of these changes, room is being made for the charismatic gifts of members. Social justice, love and compassion are biblical concepts extremely relevant to social structures. In the past Christians have often confined

themselves to the purely religious sphere. Today there is a growing awareness that social responsibility is an integral part of the Christian life, and it falls mainly within the province of the laity under the umbrella of discipleship. What is meant by social involvement is not primarily charity or handouts of essential commodities: it is the involvement of Church members in the decision-making process that determines the lives of people – politics, science, technology, culture, education, industry, business and so forth. It is the lay believer who lives in the world, knows its needs and is in a position to apply the principles of justice and love. Social justice and community service are often geared to the perception of a disadvantage in respect of material possessions, political and human rights, education and other opportunities. Unless the privileged identify with the disadvantaged, spiritual pride is a real hazard. This will result in a great obstacle on the road of discipleship.

The Church consists of people who will deliberately set themselves apart from all they know to be wrong in order to be of service to their friends and acquaintances who are yet strangers. Discipleship is real sacrifice, but the reward is great – the satisfaction of knowing you have followed obediently in the footsteps of the Disciple-Maker Himself, Jesus Christ.

In our understanding of the Christian mission and the responsibility of every local church to participate in it, as set out in this thesis, we become aware that something needs to be corrected so that the church may, once again, act more responsibly on her Lord's commission to make disciples of all nations. Andrew Murray asserts that,

The missionary problem is a personal problem. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Author and Leader of Missions. Whoever stands right with Him, and abides in Him, will be ready to know and do His will. It is simply a matter of being near enough to Him to hear

His voice, and so devoted to Him and His love as to be ready to do all His will. He loved me and gave Himself for me... He tells me that as a member of His Body, He needs me for His service, and in love I gladly yield myself to Him... Every missionary sermon or meeting must give the love of Christ first place (1979:134, 135).

Secure in His love it is essential that the Church reaches out in His love to make Him known to people of all nations. The place to start is through prayer, that is, asking for directions from the Lord Himself.

5.1. Praying for the Nations

Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17). Jesus moved from town to town preaching the Good News of the Kingdom. Moved with compassion as He saw the helpless state of people "without a shepherd", He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field" (Matt 9:35-38). These are just two references which indicate the responsibility of the body of disciples of Christ, to pray. Such prayer must be in accordance with the will of God, therefore, it is essential that it lines up with Scriptural directives. In other words, the prayer of the local church must be prayer, prayed through the Bible. It is through the Bible that we understand the nature, the power and the concerns of God. We, therefore, in Christ, approach, in prayer, our loving Father, Who is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should be saved (2 Pt 3:9). As we make our way from Genesis through to Revelation, our understanding of God as One who is deeply concerned for all people everywhere will motivate us to pray along the lines of His concern. Prayer will bring to the Church a greater understanding of what God wants to do in His world through

churches whose members are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33).

David Bryant relates how a group of six church leaders, dissatisfied with the impact for Christ their church was having on the world agreed to meet for six weeks of prayer, four nights a week for two hours a night. Not knowing quite how to go about it, a suggestion that they pray through Scripture led them to choose Ephesians as their guide for prayer. Bryant continues,

And what an unforgettable six weeks. You can't pray through Scripture like Ephesians and stay the same. Paul swept us along in God's purposes for the nations and the Church. And I believe we saw some key evidences of spiritual awakening as a result. We grew, as a congregation, in a new appreciation for world evangelisation and in a desire to begin giving ourselves to whatever God would ask of us in serving Christ's global cause. This was a new experience for me, and it could have been spawned only in prayer. Previously, I had run from missions, even in seminary. In thrilling ways, God has worked through that little church over the past 15 years to bring Christ to the nations (1984:30).

Prayer, as described above, and a vision for the world which the Holy Spirit gives to people, like the group of six as described in this story, led them to deeper commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ as they grew step by step in faith and obedience. They were able to view their lives in terms of what part they were playing in bringing the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Such thinking affects the entire lifestyle of a person. It leads one to evaluate use of time, use of money, choice of career, use of talents and abilities and to evaluate

all decisions made regarding life on earth, in terms of their contribution to making disciples of all nations.

There is a movement across the world today where people, churches are banding together to pray through the Bible for spiritual awakening in the churches and for world evangelisation. To quote Eric Alexander, a Scottish pastor and world missions leader, “The frontline in world evangelisation is the Word of God and Prayer” (Bryant 1984:1).

The local church which is keen to truly be light in its own community and to reach further afield needs to start seeing people in the world, the way God sees them. This understanding comes as His Word is searched and as members of His body echo in prayer the yearnings and desires God has for people. His desire is that they might know Him and come to Him in repentance and accept the forgiveness purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ and as they serve Him as Lord of their lives and become part of a local body of believers to live lives which will actively be involved in prayer for the people not yet reached by the Gospel.

Prayer focusing on God’s world leads us to view continents, countries, religious groups, unreached peoples from God’s perspective. Churches praying for God’s global concerns need not fear that local issues will be neglected. A cliché which aptly describes how focusing on the world will bring to the attention of prayers the needs at home, is: “The light that shines the farthest, shines brightest at home”. As we view, through the Bible, God’s concept of His world and in prayer cry out to Him to help us make Him known throughout the world, He works in us a new vision for those in our own area of the world, so that while our global vision increases, our vision for the Kingdom of God to come in our local area intensifies. We begin to understand the reason why God initially blessed Abraham in Gn 12, namely, “to be a blessing”. Again, put in cliché terms, “the reason for the filling is the overflow”.

There are many helps available to the churches to teach us to pray in line with God's will. The task is tremendous and therefore the Church, often because of fear of the implications of total commitment to Christ, quietly ignores the call of Christ to be a house of prayer for all nations. The time has arrived – in fact, it is overdue – when each local church should stand before her Lord and in prayer ask Him to help her to become just what she should be. Such prayer will lead her away from selfish planning, spending, etc, and she will begin to give herself more conscientiously to her Lord in service for His Kingdom.

5.2. Developing Potential Missionaries

The church carrying out its responsibility to Christ's mission in the world must be involved in a shepherding/discipling ministry where every person is being guided to do the work of the ministry using the gift/gifts which Christ has given to each one for the good of the whole body. The local church is where potential missionaries are trained to be church people who are caring for other members of the body (as discussed earlier).

It is important that missionaries have the right concept of what the Church is all about and that the place of practical training for missionaries, is the local church. A Bible college training, which is essential for the understanding of the Scriptures, can never replace the training potential of the local church where elders model what the Christian life is all about and where gifted teachers, "speak the truth in love". The understanding of the local church which the missionary has formed in his home church is the model which he will seek to reproduce in the foreign culture. It is therefore imperative that our local churches see the importance of placing the emphasis of their ministries where the Bible places it, that is, on proper relationship to Christ as Head of the Body and of each individual and proper relationship in Christ of each member to each other, and with these in order reaching out to the lost – both locally and further afield. The local church is responsible to "grow" people who are moving away from

selfishness and who are learning to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. People who are being trained to participate in the Christian mission, must be involved in the 2 Timothy 2:2 concept of teaching, training in an ongoing process, for the making of disciples in all nations.

It should also be in the local church that those who are gifted to go as missionaries should be recognised and encouraged to develop their gifts and to undergo any further training required for them to be able to minister in a different culture. The New Testament emphasizes the corporate initiative of the congregation or the informed initiative of missionaries in selecting suitable people as missionaries, e.g. Saul and Barnabas were set apart by the local church at Antioch (Ac 13:1-4); Barnabas took Mark (Ac 15:39); Paul chose Silas (Ac 15:40); Timothy was well spoken of by the church at Lystra, and was chosen by Paul (Ac 16:3) (Griffiths 1974:12, 13). Kerry Lovering, SIM missionary, states, The Scriptural role of the local church as the sending authority and financial base for world evangelisation needs to be brought back in clearer focus (1975:11). This thinking does not override the responsibility of the potential missionary candidate to respond negatively or positively, but it can mean that the individual's subjective sense of a calling is confirmed by the objective call of his local church body and together reinforces his assurance of the Holy Spirit's guidance (Griffiths 1974:17).

A missionary sent from a church which has nurtured him and has taught him the importance of caring for others, will go to the mission field in the sure knowledge that his church, which has sent him will: "Stand with him; Go with him; Sacrifice with him; Pray with him; And underwrite his support" (Peters 1972:221). Peters suggests that in the laying-on of hands at the missionary's commissioning service, we should see it as, "A divine authority we exercise and a responsibility we assume" (Peters 1972:222).

A local church where the Christian mission has high priority, will therefore, be training world Christians who will go to plant churches in other cultures and world Christians who will remain at the home base actively engaged in every aspect of support essential for the task of the ones who have gone.

5.3. Local Cross-Cultural Involvement

In our South African society we have many opportunities for the Christian mission because of the many different cultural groups which make up our total population. Each local church should be careful not to be blind to other cultural/language people in their neighbourhood, or nearby. Remembering that in God's sight, there is no such thing as an inferior or a superior people, but that each people group is in need of the same forgiveness purchased by the one Saviour, each local church must prayerfully consider its responsibility to "be good news" in its own culture and to the other cultures, locally. Bearing in mind the relational nature of the Body of Christ and how that emphasis is always moving us away from self-centred interests towards love of others for their good (Biblically defined) , we shall see how this continues to dictate our involvement in other cultural groups.

The domestic worker or gardener who works in the home of a church family is the closest other cultural person to whom the believer has the opportunity to be good news so that he/she may share the Good News of the Gospel. On the other hand it may be the Christian domestic worker or gardener who works in the home of a non-Christian family, who has the responsibility to share the Good News with her/his employer.

A case study of the involvement of a small church in the Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa area could serve as an encouragement for other churches to reach out to people of cultures different to their own, with the Gospel Message. Aware of local domestic workers who were keen to learn skills such as cooking,

dressmaking, knitting , crochet and English literacy, a group of church members offered tuition at a “College for Domestic” in the church premises. A domestic’s employment agency was also set in motion. Side by side relationships were built as teachers and students met together each week. Included in the programme was a 15-minute devotional talk. Occasional Sunday services were held, when the Gospel was presented in the languages of the students by visiting pastors. For various reasons (lack of staff, etc), it was no longer possible to continue the college – but a couple of the students expressed a desire for Bible Study. Through the years the Bible Study Group has grown and as a result of shepherding and discipling in the group, various material needs have been met by different church members. Through the study of the Word of God, the spiritual needs of the students are being met. Several ladies have completed some Bible courses. These courses which are offered in most of the South African languages have been of great value to these domestic workers and they have encouraged others to enroll. These students are developing growing concern for their families who are living in the rural areas of our land. When these ladies go home for weekends and holidays, they share the Good News of the Gospel with their families, relatives and friends – by personal testimony of their relationship to Christ, and by using literature (records, tapes and visual aid charts) , all of which are available in their own languages. The interaction between the members of this Bible Study Group has made the participants aware that the different languages have different cultural nuances and norms, but as they get together under the authority of God’s Word, they find that they all have the same need, Biblically defined, which is to know Christ as Lord of their lives and to share the Good News with others by “modelling the Gospel” and by verbally expressing what life in Christ is all about. In effect it can be said that this local church through the love of Christ expressed through those members who initiated the “College for Domestic”, is having an impact for the Kingdom of God in and also among the domestics and gardeners locally, as well as further afield in South Africa, while the witness of these ladies in the Bible Study Group is also not unnoticed by their, in most cases, non-Christian employers.

At present there is much talk about cross-cultural reconciliation in South Africa. The only true reconciliation possible is reconciliation with God, brought about through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross which has dealt with the cause of our separation from Him – our sin. To the Christian, Christ has given the ministry of reconciliation, that is, the task of helping others to be reconciled to Christ. It is only as people stand together in Christ that they can truly stand together with each other. Therefore, local churches must reach out to other cultural groups for the purpose of building relationships centred in Christ, with Christians in those groups so that we may more effectively help each other towards fulfilling our Lord's commission to make disciples of all nations. People from different cultures must encourage each other. This will involve getting to really know each other – not only as members of churches meet together for church meetings, but as members get together informally in homes. It is Christ who has brought us into union with Himself, so it is important that He and His purposes in the church and in the world must be the focus of our attention. In developing such encouragement we must be careful that we are directed by Biblical principles. Prayerfully we must help each other build churches which, because of its Bible-based shepherding/discipling ministry, will be light and salt in our own communities (cultural groups), and houses of prayer for all nations.

5. 4. Involvement with Particular Missionaries

There are many missionaries who have left their land of birth for the sake of the Kingdom of God who are not being cared for adequately. There may be many reasons for this state of affairs. One possibility could be that in earlier days of mission sending the importance of sending people who were church-based was not as clearly understood as it is today, so that many people went off to the field without the support of a caring church, interested in them and in their work.

Involvement with members of your local church who are missionaries will of course be your first responsibility, but in cases, particularly of a young church where missionary vision is still developing and no one is ready, as yet, to serve as missionaries, it is of vital importance for such a church to find a missionary for whom the members can care. One of the many mission agencies in South Africa will be able to give details of missionaries who are not fully supported financially and will also supply the church with information regarding the work in which such missionaries are involved.

In a local church where the small shepherding groups are in operation, it is possible for each one of the groups to “Adopt a Missionary” (as we mention the word “missionary”, we include his/her family). Whether the missionary is part of the church membership or whether he is adopted, the responsibility of the shepherding group is to care for him. The following are some suggestions of how to go about it:

- 1) Through regular correspondence. A member of the group volunteers to write regularly to the missionary and so develops a close link between the missionary and the group. What is written must be news for the missionary as well – keep him informed of church events, city events, country events and anything which is of particular interest to him, e.g. sport, new trends in his particular field of interest, latest books, etc.. Ask questions regarding the hopes, fears, goals, needs which he has regarding himself personally and also regarding the people he is working with. In this way the one who writes regularly will be building up an understanding of the battles, victories, difficulties and joys the missionary may be experiencing and also an understanding of how the people to whom he has gone are responding to the Gospel. Tapes, CD’s, photographs, slides may be exchanged so that faces and people become more real to both missionary and care group. Other members of the group must feel quite free to write to the missionary – but one person must be responsible to see that regular communication takes place.

2) Through regular prayer. Each week as the shepherding group meets, time must be given to sharing news of the missionary and his work and then prayer must be made accordingly. As members in the group pray for each other during the week, the missionary must be included as part of the group. It may be that the Holy Spirit moves members of the group to become part of the answer to those prayers, e.g. by meeting some particular need – financially or in whatever way necessary.

3) When the missionary comes home on furlough the caring must continue as the group in a practical way helps with accommodation, transport, groceries, clothing, and in any other material way necessary. They must also surround the missionary with lots of love and understanding as he moves back into his home culture, which for some can be rather traumatic, depending on the measure of cultural difference experienced on the mission field and also on the period of time he has been away from home. It is important to remember that the missionary, like any other Christian, needs to be refreshed spiritually, as well as physically, so that he may return to the field with new motivation and strengthened for the task to which the Lord has called him.

Involvement with missionaries in the small groups must be shared with other members from time to time when they get together in the larger body of the church. As churches become more involved with particular missionaries their vision for world mission will grow. Such involvement in the life and work of missionaries is another way in which the Body of Christ is moved away from just thinking in terms of their local interests, because a church, like a person, can be so involved in caring for itself that it may forget its purpose of seeking first the Kingdom of God.

5.5. Setting up a Missions Programme

If any local church is asking the question: “We’re interested in world evangelisation. What can we do?”, then here is a simple way to get going. If this programme can be widely promoted, many will be challenged to get involved and adopt it. Once implemented, radical change in the nature of world missions will be seen in just a few years.

3 Keys to a Missions-Minded Congregation

1. **Centrality**: Missions will become a vital part of your ministry and the life of the church when it is seen as central to the purpose of the church and not merely a department for those who are keen.
2. **Motivation**: Once the missions vision is seen as central the key role of the pastor is the motivation of his/her leaders and congregation. This will be achieved by a demonstration of personal commitment and by the evidence of clearly expressed goals and aims. Leaders have to know where they are going before they can take people with them.
3. **Involvement**: The third key to a vibrant commitment to missions is creating opportunities for people to be involved. Missions must not be seen to be the domain of a few “special” Christians, but rather the responsibility of all believers – Missional Member Ministry (MMM) (Griffiths 1983:8-16).

Practical Steps

1. Leaders need to make sure they are convinced about missions themselves. Missions-minded churches follow missions-minded leaders.
2. Evaluate the current situation. Identify key people and get to know missionaries currently supported by the church and by individuals in the

- church. As one goes through the process, build on what is good and sensitively bring to an end that which detracts from the strategy.
3. Set up a committee of committed people.
 4. Start praying together about involvement in world missions. Make sure everyone is active – Missional Member Ministry (MMM).
 5. Begin to draw up a strategy of where the church needs to go. This should include things like:
 - Priorities. What areas of missions will the church seek to be involved in? Unreached, education, social needs, local, foreign, etc.
 - How will this be funded? Giving, budgeted, faith promise.
 - What type of missionaries will be supported? How will suitability be determined? What criteria will be applied?
 - What kind of involvement and commitment will you have with a missionary?
 - How will levels of support be determined? What happens if there are currency fluctuations? What happens if the missionary retires or returns ill?
 - How will the congregation be motivated?
 - How can the congregation become involved?
 - What will your relationship with missions agencies be? Which agencies will you be happy to work with?
 - How will the missions committee function? What sort of decision making power will it have? Who will be on the committee, how are they selected, and how long will they serve for?
 - How will the church's progress be evaluated?
 6. From the above information begin to draw up a missions policy. Remember that a policy should be there to describe procedure and to guide not to restrict and hinder – See Appendix E (Example of a Missions Policy).
 7. Implement. Start small and do not overextend. Do not spread support and finances too thin, at the same time trust God for what is needed.

Implementation

- Preach about missions, study missions in Bible studies and Sunday School.
- Choose one or two suitable missionaries (if you do not already have contacts) and introduce them to the congregation.
- Start by regularly praying for them.
- See if there are any one-off projects that the church can undertake.
- Launch the missions program with a focused week or weekend.
- Determine how much regular support the church can afford (by faith).
- Keep in regular contact with the missionaries. Expect communication from them on a regular basis. Make use of modern technology such as faxes, email & telephones.
- Organise for members of your congregation to be involved in some form of short-term missions.
- Visit the missionaries.
- Identify potential missionaries from amongst the congregation. Begin discipling them and providing opportunities for ministry.
- Never stop communicating the missions visions with the congregation, and encouraging them to be involved.
- Keep promoting the missionaries. Find creative ways of allowing the non-communicators to share with the church.
- Build credibility. Choose missionaries carefully, with as much care, if not more, than you would another pastor.
- In bigger congregations it may be necessary to form smaller interest groups for individual missionaries so that they don't get lost in the crowd.
- Make the maximum use of missionaries when they are on furlough/home assignment.

5.6. Establishing a Missions Committee

For a church to participate more effectively in the Christian mission, it soon becomes apparent that a missions committee is needed. As the church is

exposed to missions through prayer for spiritual awakening in the church and for world evangelization; through local cross-cultural involvement; through a caring ministry to missionaries – people who have a particular concern for the Christian mission will surface. From such people, whom the Holy Spirit has particularly burdened, a missions committee should be appointed or elected.

The missions committee should be concerned with:

- 1) Creating interest, because interest in mission is not a spontaneous thing – it needs to be motivated.
- 2) Maintaining interest, because without constant renewal it will die out.
- 3) Encouraging commitment. Interest is not the same as commitment and for the Church to fulfill her role in mission, its members must commit themselves to “go” as missionaries or to “stay” as supporters.
- 4) Liaising with missionaries, so that the church is made aware of their situations (Lovering 1975:8).

A missions policy is included as an example – Appendix E. It does not claim to be perfect or the only way to do it. It is however one that has seen to operate with success in a local Baptist church. Two things need to be kept in mind with regards policies such as this. One, they must reflect the realities of the specific church for whom they are relevant and must constantly be reviewed and updated. Secondly, they must always balance being detailed enough to be useful, but brief enough to be accessible and actually be read and used.

5.6.1. The Overall Responsibility of the Missions Committee

- 1) To stimulate intercessory prayer by the congregation for world mission and for particular missionaries, by exploring ways to encourage prayer for missions.
- 2) To educate and inspire the congregation in the field of world mission by identifying areas where education is needed and by developing programmes in the different departments of the church which will help church people of all ages to become mission-minded.

- 3) To encourage members to enter missionary service by requesting them to pray that God will raise up people from their membership, who will be willing to go into missionary service, and then to help such people with appropriate literature and information front missionary societies and to help them assess their sense of calling.
- 4) To encourage members in the area of financial support, by making the needs of missionaries known. In giving it is important to maintain a personal interest in the missionary by the church, so that the missionary will not just be a worker “out there” informing the church, but will be seen as a person and part of the local body, still aware of what is happening in the local church and therefore praying for the members at home, as they in turn pray for the members on the field and meet their financial needs.
- 5) To develop a “missions policy” so that the church is kept going in the right direction and to prevent important decisions being made in a haphazard or emotional manner. Such a policy would be a tool for the church leadership to assess the missions strategy in the context of the whole ministry of the church. Once a missions policy has been agreed upon by the selected committee and approved of by the church it should be worked from carefully with much prayerful consideration and caution being exercised when an issue contrary to the policy comes up.

Although the above is the ideal in the steps to advance the missionary enterprise, there needs to be some recognized measurement to comprehend whether progress is being made. The simple task at hand is for each generation in their different geographical locations to be reached with the Gospel as well as ministry of the Word and service to all nations.

The above suggested ways for the local church to participate in the Christian mission are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to encourage churches in their own local setting to determine what direction they should be taking.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION AND PROPOSAL FOR A WAY

FORWARD

1. The Need To Rediscover the Priesthood of All Believers

In this analysis, the researcher put forward what seemed to be a position of passive dependence of the laity on the clergy and that this was certainly the case in the BUSA. The researcher suggested that each member, both clergy and laity, had their own distinctive contribution to make to the life of the church and the expansion of God's kingdom in the world.

The proposition and hypothesis that was suggested at the outset of this research was implemented and put into operation. The researcher believed that the biblical view of the priesthood of all believers or every-member ministry (EMM) illustrates that empowering the laity at grass roots level to be ministers of the Gospel should be standard. This view alerts churches to change their priorities so that more people can engage in ministry that serves the nations of the world. This was certainly the outcome of the findings of this research. It was suggested that from the analysis and data ascertained, diagnosis would help establish a way forward to produce responsible and mature churches in the BUSA.

The research conducted made some interesting observations about the laity in the BUSA. It discovered that the laity is generally seen to be a threat to the leadership – although this was not felt by the leadership but rather by the laity. Indeed, there is a very shallow understanding of the priesthood of all believers by the clergy as well as the laity. This was, and still is, evident in discussions with members of BUSA churches – as the researcher is a participant observer and a lecturer at one of the two theological colleges of the denomination. Gifts have not been understood or discovered by the laity in local churches in the BUSA or even laity among other denominations of churches in South Africa. Generally speaking, it is apparent that most believers do not know how the church functions

or even how it should function. There is a major lack of education and an exclusion of church members in the activities of local churches.

The fact that believers constitute the church is indisputable; this circumstance cannot be overestimated. The theological attention paid to this fact has however in no way been proportionate with its significance. Although renewed interest in a “theology of the laity” developed in the late 1950’s and continued to flourish for a decade or more, it has not really become an accepted field of theological interest. Only more recently has there been a renewing in this area.

At the climax of His ministry, Jesus said, “I will build my church ...” (Matthew 16:18). This was no afterthought but a declaration of His purpose which He had from the beginning. He was getting ready to build His church during the silent years of His preparation, during all the happenings in history and He has been building His Church until now.

However, it is no secret that the organized Church today is in trouble. Not only has the institution lost momentum, but in the eyes of many, has lost direction. Unless persons in the Church and theology come forth who can lead the church to renewal, there is little hope that the situation will change for the better. This has been established from the data collected on the status of the laity in South Africa.

In this research, the Scriptures have been searched to mediate Christ’s authoritative presence which prompts responsible acknowledgement of His Lordship. Christ baptizes the believer in the Spirit into His body emancipating from individualism and isolation. Christian life is turned from ego-centric planning out toward service for others with Christ in the world through the Church. This faith in Christ leads to obedience of faith among all nations of the world (Rm 1:5).

2. The Importance of Local Churches

Local churches free these leaders by ordination to serve the church in equipping all believers to be ministers of the Gospel (Every-Member Ministry or Priesthood of all Believers). What sounds more practical in thought and action is the term “Missional Member Ministry” (MMM). There is resistance to the development of an elevated hierarchy which separates clergy from laity. Teachers and elders complement one another so that the Gospel can be seen and heard, that is, the Gospel is modeled through their lifestyles and families.

Local churches obey Christ’s plans and purposes. The sacrament of baptism initiates believers into the local church where they serve in the continuum of discipling among all nations. Obedience to the Christian mission informs the life and activity of local churches and so they exist and plan accordingly.

Local churches select, equip and send missionaries across cultures in Apostolic Teams to present the claims of Christ to peoples. This proclamation of the Gospel results in Christian families from which elders emerge who are enlisted from the beginning to serve with the missionaries. Indigenous teachers are empowered to help in reflecting on the Gospel and in perfecting contextualization. The mission field is now becoming the church field.

In the field of discipleship, local churches understand that genuine responsibility for the Christian mission by sending their own missionaries. Socio-political action is only part of the Christian mission when it is informed by the Gospel of Christ as understood by responsible local churches. Denominations and Mission Societies must not hinder the development of viable local churches responsible for Christ’s mission in the world.

Our study of the Christian mission leads us to conclude that people of every group must be reached with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is

God's desire that all men everywhere should turn to Him in repentance from sin, and through the sacrifice of His Son, be forgiven and thus be reconciled to God. This reconciliation to God results in people, previously at enmity with Him, becoming children of God. Such people are made alive in Christ, by virtue of His Presence in them. Together with other believers they serve Him as Head of the Church. Local churches, where He is served as Lord, will be Bible-based in their teaching as gifted teachers unfold the Word of God and thus the membership will be prepared for the work of the ministry as the Holy Spirit directs them in particular avenues of service.

Local churches which are obedient to their Lord in what they have learned as the Word has been faithfully studied, will be characterised by a shepherding / discipling ministry in which the principles of the Kingdom of God are adhered to, and where its members show in their lifestyle what citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are like. Churches living like this will be salt and light in their own communities and will be involved in taking the message of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who have not yet heard it, both locally and then to other parts of the world where He is not known.

The task is tremendous and millions still need to hear that they can be reconciled to God. Let us, as members of the Church of Jesus Christ, not be overcome at the immensity of the task. Rather let us, in faith, be obedient to the command to take the Gospel to all nations. Paul reminds us that, "...we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Rm 1:5). •

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is clearly prescribed in the New Testament – especially in 1 Pt 2:9, 10 – and totally ignored by most all Christians. It appears most Christians accept the two tier system where there is an "educated class" of Christians known as "clergy" and a "mediocre class" known as "laity."

Martin Luther, in the Reformation, reestablished the doctrine of "priesthood of all believers" from Peter's statement and from Paul's equality teaching in Galatians. Yet most Christian denominations – religious systems – establish and enforce a two class society of "clergy" and "laity." This has been examined and this idea seems an anomaly. But this was never Jesus' intention

The list of offices in Eph 4:11-16 clearly are gifts to be used for the good of the whole body of Christ. Paul did not imply or assign authority for one Christian to hold over another. It appears, few either know or care about Jesus' original words and ways as recorded in the Bible.

Therefore, the clergy and laity are to remember: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; one you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." (1 Pt 2:9, 10 – RSV).

3. Issues to be Addressed by the BUSA

Each local body of believers must assess whether they have realised that their church has come into being for the purpose of making their Lord known in their own community and beyond. When Jesus is served as Lord, the selfishness in us which keeps us from moving out towards other people, is dealt with as we move with Him in the direction He wants us to go, that is, sharing His love and telling the Gospel message to those who still need to hear it. The church must fulfill her responsibility to be a bearer of the Good News of Christ, until He returns in power and glory. For some, it will mean going and for the rest, supporting in every way possible.

What is of imperative importance for the BUSA – as well as the Church universally – is to acknowledge there is a great challenge ahead and for the church to begin to put into practice its distinguishing factors: 1) The church's understanding in the sending process from a biblical perspective; 2) The role

discipling has to play in the process; 3) How effective teaching should be in the context (the mission field becoming a church field); and 4) The church field becoming a mission field in turn. These distinguishing factors are crucial for the end goal to be reached, which is the obedience of the Great Commission.

Although these distinguishing factors represent real steps in the advance of missionary endeavour which can be recognized to measure progress, they actually represent a continuous over-lapping and dynamic growth because of the goal of the Christian mission. Each generation in geographical locations must be reached as well as a ministry of Word and service to all nations.

As the planning for a better future for the BUSA takes place, the above basic concepts need to be the root basis of planning and discussion. The following must also be kept high on the agenda of planning:

- All believers have gifts which must be used to serve one another and the world. Thus everybody has a ministry.
- Although the church is the body of Christ and a living organism, it cannot exist in the world without necessary structures, organization and leaders. These people and structures are however in the service of their church and their position is secondary to those of church members.
- The fact that Christians have charismatic gifts does not rule out the need for training, teaching and education. Formerly comprehensive education was largely confined to the clergy.
- Training does not mean that church members become mini-Pastors. But this qualification does not exclude the possibility of church members performing certain functions which are currently fulfilled mainly or entirely by the Pastor.
- Examples of functions for which church members may be trained include the following:

- Visiting the sick, possibly specializing in visits to hospitals, chronically and terminally ill patients;
- Visiting newcomers to the neighbourhood;
- Taking charge of parts of the service of worship, including preaching;
- Certain facets of pastoral work – why should the Pastor be considered the best person to counsel young couples preparing for marriage?
- Care of the aged – here the possibilities are endless;
- Bible study group leaders;
- Home Visitation;
- Youth Workers.

This list could be extended.

Two important areas of training need to be mentioned. The first is the training and equipping of members to live and work in society as Christians. The focus should be on training people to conduct dialogue and to play a Christian role in decision-making processes. In such a training programme, members of a particular profession or engaged in a certain type of work, may gather in groups in order to work out a strategy and identify problems.

The second is to train and equip parents to be able to give their children religious and spiritual guidance. Research has shown that the home is the principal venue for spiritual moulding. Yet the church does very little to give parents active support in this regard. No institution will appoint people to posts for which they have no training or, if they are not fully qualified, will fail to train them. The education and upbringing of children is one of the very few tasks for which people are considered to be qualified. A detailed comprehensive programme will have to be drawn up if such training is to be at all effective.

It would also be important to allow the laity to do more courses through the two denominational theological colleges, namely, the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa (Randburg) and the Cape Town Baptist Seminary (Cape Town). These colleges equip members for ministry for the local church and the world. It would be wise to get more of the laity to attend more conferences on evangelism and missions – as it is observed that the clergy in the denomination are the ones attending most of these conferences. Short-term mission trips can be of great benefit to the laity if they are planned and executed effectively.

A few possibilities have been mentioned. Once this approach is applied in practice, certain weaknesses will emerge, as well as other fields where church members can play a greater role. Actually, the possibilities are innumerable.

All these possibilities will fade away overnight unless the church – Pastors and congregations alike – are prepared to radically reappraise the position of church members. The members are not the poor relations of the church; they are not a part of the church and they do not belong to it: they are the church (ἐκκλησία).

It is obvious that accomplishing the Christian mission is a progressing undertaking; it is not accomplished all at once.

May this proposed research result in stronger mature churches in the BUSA taking responsibility for the task of making disciples of all nations. Therefore,

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as we see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

4. Future Research

It goes without saying that the researcher did not touch upon all the issues pertaining to the role of the laity in the church today – especially in the context of South Africa. Future research needs to be done in a number of areas, for instance:

- a) A thorough study of the relationship between the New Testament teaching on discipleship, and the empowerment of the laity in our time;
- b) Peculiar challenges that await the BUSA at the beginning of the 21st century, such as, understanding of the socio-political context of South Africa, enabling the members to understand – and enjoy – the diversity in the South African society;
- c) The role of women in the BUSA, in the offices of the church as well as in the positions of the laity;
- d) The understanding and the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church today – especially in the ranks of the BUSA.