

Imagine Church Workshop

David Lawrence, Llanbedr Village Hall, 17 June 2017

David Lawrence introduced himself as a Baptist minister also working for LICC¹, and had come to give an Imagine Church training day².

His presentation was based upon the assumption that the local church is important to the ministry of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that God still works through it, and that it is possible for the local church to become effective in all these things.

This leads to the question of mission, and the necessity of mission to be not just Sunday, but every day; and the importance of discipleship, which staffs, motivates and empowers the mission; that both are necessary to the health of church.

From the point of view of Matthew 28:19-20:

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 that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

With this in mind, if this is how Jesus defines or sends the church, then a church not involved in mission and discipleship is arguably not a church any longer. David’s proposal was this; that the three; Church, Mission, Discipleship, should be inseparable. The work of LICC is to help this to happen; to help Churches engage fully and actively with Discipleship and Mission.

LICC was founded by John Stott with a particular emphasis; *How do we, in our Time and Culture, pay attention to Scripture? How do we, in our Scripture, pay attention to our Time and Culture?* Life must ask of faith, just as faith must ask of life. Our Faith must speak to our Life; our real faith must speak to our real life. We must somehow understand how live out an ancient faith in our modern world. The intention of LICC is to open and facilitate this conversation: How does this make a difference where I am? What are the possibilities where I am? What does this mean where I am?

Session 1: The Mission Challenge

The Gospel of Mark begins with the title; Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, which means; *the beginning of the good-news of Jesus Christ Son of God.* εὐαγγέλιον, ‘Good-News’ or ‘good-message’ is a word going back to Homer, the ancient Greek poet³. It is from this that the word Gospel was made; ‘good-spell’ or ‘spelling-good’, meaning to tell or announce something good, or the good-message itself. This Good News is of such importance as to be repeated four times, for there are four Gospel stories, each telling a similar but not identical story; four different versions of the same Good News. Each one ends though with a similar message, and with that self same message Acts also begins:

Matthew 28:19 *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.* (ESV)

¹ <https://www.licc.org.uk/>

² <https://www.licc.org.uk/resources/imagine-church-training-day/>

³Homer; *Odyssey*; Book 14, 152: εὐαγγέλιον δέ μοι ἔστω αὐτίκ’, ἐπεὶ κεν κείνος ἰὼν τὰ ἄδωμάθ’ ἴκηται: *But Good-News to me, let it stand forthwith, until that man has come, going to his home.* In this case, the Good –News is the idea that Odysseus would return home, to his own kingdom, oust the usurpers, unite with his wife, and restore order to his kingdom, Ithaka.

Mark 16:15 *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. (ESV)*

Luke 24:47 *and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (ESV)*

John 20:30-31 *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (ESV)*

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (ESV)*

This idea of the disciples being sent is further iterated elsewhere in the Gospels as well; John 20:21 *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* This reading describes a pattern; Jesus was sent into the world by the Father; then he sent the apostles in to the world; now he sends us:

Luke 24:48 *You are witnesses of these things.*

John 15:27 *And you also will bear witness,*

John 19:35 *He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.*

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in (Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria), and to the end of the earth."*

Each account of the good news concludes with the disciples being sent out in order to make Jesus known, to the whole earth, and all its inhabitants. The church is not a dead-god club; we think of him as alive, and therefore us as part of this story, and therefore we are part of this task.

As a part then, of our entering in this story, let us *Imagine*; how can we spread this message around the UK? If the world is dark, where then is the light? Where are the people? How does this happen?

A lot of time, there is an assumption that if the people gather, and the gathering is good, then the other people will come; in effect, that the other people are just waiting for our gathering to be just right, for then they will know, and the they will just come. But the truth is that the people outside the church are not just waiting for our gathering to become just right. Most people seeing a church see it as something that has nothing to do with them; like a non-gambler walking past a betting shop; they might be critical of certain things they associate with the church, or they might even feel sorry for people who go, believing them to be ignorant, or naive, or oppressed by it. If our main strategy and tactic for drawing in new members is to wait, then we have a profound problem.

But we who go to church don't actually live all our lives therein; we rub shoulders with people outside the church in all sorts of ways, constantly. What then, if we invest our faith, not just into church? What about our energy invested elsewhere? What if, when we left the church premises, we left as people who did *not* just leave all their faith inside, and go out, determined to blend in to life outside as much as possible, and become invisible? What if, when we left the church we went out as *Full Time Christian Workers*? Normal, day to day, ordinary, real life can be lived out as a *Christian Worker*. We can shift in our thinking from being the gathered church at meetings, to becoming the scattered church throughout the world. The gathered church in its meetings can become the place of equipping and energising for the scattering of its members, day to day, for the rest of the week.

God is not just in the church meetings; God is also out in the world. Jesus went out:

John 5:17 *But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."*

John 5:19 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."*

We too can go out meet the Father in whatever he is doing out there. God has called all who respond to be ambassadors:

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Definition of Ambassador: An **ambassador** is an official envoy, especially a highest ranking diplomat who represents a state and is usually accredited to another sovereign state, or to an international organization as the resident representative of their own government or sovereign or appointed for a special and often temporary diplomatic assignment. The word is also often used more liberally for persons who are known, without national appointment, to represent certain professions, activities and fields of endeavour such as sales.⁴

We are ambassadors for the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of us, scattered about in our own lives, are representing that Kingdom to people who maybe otherwise untouched. Every day, members of our churches are scattered in the world; we don't need to make a special expedition, for it is where we live our daily lives; but we might consider how well our representatives are equipped.

This place of scattering where we daily interact with the world outside of the knowledge of God we might term our *Frontline*. We all spend significant amounts of time there.

We might consider an example: a housebound man, David. Not an obvious candidate for going out to spread the good news. His frontline was the succession of carers that came to his house, and helped him get about. His faith was alive, and he could not but help share it, and then there they were with him at church; his carers; the people he knew from his *Frontline*.

Our mission field is not just overseas; it is where our members are, in the broad field of daily life. We spend roughly 120 hours each week awake. Of that, a really committed enthusiast might spend 10 hours at church; but then, even they are spending 110 hours awake elsewhere.

Our goal is not to increase those 10 hours' *attendance*, but to increase those 110 hours' *influence*. Our focus for growth should be the *influence* of those 110 hours of the week. Many people who go to church do so because they met someone; they were *influenced* by someone.

Matthew 5:13 *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."*

We need to be salty, not bland or bitter or even sweet like the rest of the world around us; we need to be light, not shaded. We need to somehow show our difference, not blend in; we need to in some way proclaim our distinction; an embassy is pointless if it is anonymous and indistinguishable. The whole point of an embassy is that they are known to represent their origin, their other place.

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambassador>

We therefore need to ask; how much of what we do is about our gathering? How much is about our scattering? One thing we can do is develop a constant attention to the *Frontline*; a *Frontline* focus. Everyone has a *Frontline*, and it is our main influence to the world around us; it is our embassy to the world. This does not need to involve a massive or revolutionary or traumatic change. We can begin with small shifts of perspective.

Confidence. We can have confidence in the Gospel. Confidence that it is good. That it is good for all of life, for all people, for all things, for all time. That the Gospel is not for a niche or a slot or a section, but for the whole of life, for everyone, always.

There is a common perception that that sacred life and the secular life are separate things; that God is interested and active and present to some things, but not others; that being a Christian is about a section of life. Outwardly, this looks like church, the religious life; inwardly, it might be described as the spiritual life, the inner life, or spirituality. Both these areas might be thought of as compartments or sections, but not the whole of life. But Jesus calls us to life: John 10:10 *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*. Jesus calls us all to discipleship; to all life lived differently. The Sermon on the Mount is a pep talk; a rallying call; an exhortation about the whole life lived differently; it is about emotion, conduct, work, money, and everything; all things changed. At its heart, Christianity is not about church attendance, but about life. Its conviction, its confidence, is in everything.

Clarity. We can become clear about a strategy of mission which is about the whole of life; a strategy in equipping people for complete, fruitful mission in all of life.

We can do this in our local communities activities organised in and near our buildings; we can also do this in our communities away from the building. It is how we act in all things. We need to apply ourselves to this, to clearly examine how we do these things, and how can help do them better. It needs to be part of our agenda for leadership and organisation; our administration needs to plan for this discipleship. PCC agendas need to reflect this need for discipleship. If the customary agendas; money, buildings, services, were enough for this, we would have all this already. Where are the disciples in all this? Where is the mission? What is the mission? Church worship, the community, global concerns and charities, and finance all have their place, but in the end, they are things the church does, not what it is, nor what it is for.

The way we think and plan and organise our churches needs to reflect this clarity of purpose and strategy of mission. It can be thought of as concentric circles of mission radiating out; the church in the centre, then the immediate community, then all the people we meet in daily life, then outward to the whole world. Immediately, the clear mission priority needs to be the 110 hours a week, living in God's presence, in the familiar world around us.

Conviction. Churches bearing this in mind might consider this as a pastoral focus. Pastoral work might be considered a process with the goal of equipping for a purpose, not simply alleviating complaint or distress as an end in itself. Complains about church or life generally can reveal expectations; but some complaints can never be met. There are aspects to pastoral care which might reasonably lead to some sort of growth or development. The question for a church then, is whether any pastoral care tends to lead to growth, or whether it tends to lead to dependency. Pastoral care can be balanced with pastoral equipping:

Psalm 23:1-3 A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

The *Good* shepherd definitively cares for the sheep, ensuring their health and strength, and leading them onwards. One might examine how one spends time and regarding the congregation; how much time is spent with those in pain, with those who are activists and leaders, and with those others who are neither obviously in pain, and nor are activists or leaders. That middle group of those not in pain and not in leadership, are not just the pool of talent for recruiting to the activist section, but also the main pool for sending out; perhaps they need that pastoral time for equipping and envisioning, and then releasing out? They are the body, the main component, of the church; the mission is for the whole church; all the people are ambassadors, so that middle group who are not in pain and not in leadership are the main embassy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

An over emphasis on this equipping ethos can lead to burnout and disillusionment. An over emphasis on care can lead to dependency. A good balance should lead to maturity and growth; if maturity and growth are not forthcoming, then perhaps one should ask what omission or over emphasis needs to be addressed?

An illustration might be drawn from gardening. When planting runner beans, a row of sticks are put in, neatly tied together, so as to form a structure upon which the beans can grow. The sticks themselves are not the goal; the beans are the goal. The sticks are merely there to help the beans to grow. Sticks on their own are useless and pointless.

The church is there for the same reason as the sticks; to help growth. The church should be growing disciples in the same way that sticks grow beans. As one writer put it, *the plural of disciple is church*.⁵ Jesus died, rose from dead, and ascended into heaven in order that we might become disciples; that we might grow, and bear fruit; like beans. The structures are there to help us in this. The structures are there for a reason; to help us make disciples. The structures are not meant to be freestanding and an end in themselves.

This begs the question; what is a *disciple*? Our word is from the Latin; *disco*, 'I learn'. The word in the New Testament, in Greek, is μαθητής, pronounced *mathetes*, and from which we derive our word *mathematic*. In turn, it is derived for the word *μανθάνειν*, *manthanein*, meaning to *learn*, to *increase one's knowledge*; to *hear and be informed*; to *learn by use and practice*.

So a *disciple* is a *learner*, a *student*, a *pupil*, an *imitator*, an *apprentice*; a *follower*. To be a disciple is to willingly acquire from another that knowledge or experience previously lacking. It assumes that something is worth knowing; that it is not already known; and that it can be learned from someone; and that the prospective learner is willing to be taught, and to learn.

Discipleship then is an activity of learning; a means to an end. It is a learning relationship with someone. It describes our relationship with God.

An apprentice is one who puts himself under someone, in order to emulate them. He finds someone who can do what he wants to do, and learns from them how to do it. A disciple therefore, a Christian disciple, is one who learns to do what Jesus does; to live as Jesus lives. Our discipleship is never finished; we always remain as disciples, as learners. A Christian disciple is someone learning to live; live the way of Jesus, in the context of that moment. That context is always changing; therefore we always need to keep examining, and learning, '*How does Jesus do this?*'

These principles can be summed up for thinking through in a model named 6M discipleship:

⁵Morgan, Alison; 2015; *Following Jesus: The Plural of Disciple is Church*; Resource.

6 M Discipleship

1. **Making** good work – whatever you do, do it for God, and do it as well as we can, so that whatever work you do has the savour of Heaven.
Colossians 3:17, 23; *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,*
2. **Modelling** godly character – This is basically about the fruits of the spirit; Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
3. **Ministering** Grace and Love. Showing goodness, being gracious and kind, and acting in love.
4. **Moulding** Culture. We try to improve the way things are done, the way we live on the front line, so that the way life is lived in that place is better, more wholesome. So that better practices or principles guide the way things are done in general.
5. **Mouth piece** of truth and justice – we stand up or speak up for what is right, true and just; not agreeing with lies, falsehoods and injustices.
6. **Messenger** of the Gospel. We need to be willing to say at the right moment, this is Christ, and speak truthfully about the hope within us.

There is a book that describes some of these things called *Fruitfulness On The Front Line*⁶ and in this book there are 6 sessions for discussion at home groups that can be used to examine these 6 aspects of discipleship.

There is also a short story show, an illustration of this principal in work, the story of Margaret, a widow who lived alone. Margaret heard about someone called Sue who had moved into social housing near her to escape from her violent husband, and she invited Sue for tea. They heard about someone called Malcolm who was depressed and isolated, also living in social housing nearby, and he started coming for tea as well. Then they heard about a couple called Rex and Bev who were struggling; arguing and having problems with alcohol. They ended up all doing an alpha course together, simply because Margaret had them round to her house for tea.

The Red Dot For The Grey World

We need to try and be encouraging, knowing people well enough to see their gifts. Everyone is different with different gifts and different opportunities.

We need also to start learning to recognise needs in the community. For example, we might offer to anyone tots groups, the CAP money course⁷, a marriage course⁸ or a parenting course⁹. The question is,

⁶Greene, Mark; 2014; *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*; IVP.

⁷ <https://capuk.org/i-want-help/courses/cap-money-course/introduction>

The CAP Money Course is a free course that will teach you budgeting skills and a simple, cash-based system that works. In just a few weeks, you will get to grips with your finances so you can budget, save and prevent debt. Whether you feel pretty organised or whether it's like a lucky dip every time you try to withdraw cash from your account, the CAP Money Course will help you take complete control of your finances. There are hundreds of courses run throughout the country each year, along with specific courses for students, youth and kids.

⁸ <http://themarriagecourses.org/>

The Marriage Course is a series of seven sessions, designed to help couples invest in their relationship and build a strong marriage.

The Marriage Preparation Course is a series of five sessions to help engaged couples or those exploring the possibility of marriage, to build strong foundations for their future together.

⁹ <http://themarriagecourses.org/try-parenting/the-parenting-children-course>

The Parenting Children Course was developed in 1990 by Nicky and Sila Lee (authors of [The Parenting Book](#)) for parents and care-givers looking for practical support to strengthen their family relationships.

'How can our congregations become the people to build bridges, to earn the right to invite?' We can do this by caring, by being kind to our neighbours. We can pray to be equipped each day as we go out, to be attentive to see what the Father is doing. To ask to be equipped for these opportunities as they arise.

Churches Need:

1. Jesus: We need confidence in the presence of Jesus with us. We can't share faith if we haven't first got it. The first question is how faith can be quickened and excited in our churches. About how we can become convinced about the Lord's presence with us.
2. Fellowship: Our Discipleship is not meant to be individualism, and it is not just a professional thing either; it is always about one another. There is always a personal and individual aspect to faith, but that always comes back to company, to fellowship, so we learn and live and grow in our faith with one another. The personal and the community aspects of Faith and the knowledge of God always bounce off each other. If we have no personal faith, then we have nothing to contribute to our fellowship; if we have no fellowship, we have no one around us to work with us and to help us.

One of the golden rules of change is that someone will be upset. We do not need to be afraid of that; it is not necessarily proof that we are wrong.

Formation: How do we grow?

We grow through through daily anticipation, daily expectation, daily execution, daily preparation.

We grow through prayer, scripture, worship, fellowship, communion, and through being taught. All these things will build us up, and as red dots in the grey world, make our redness more red.

The *Front Line* then is the question of where we apply our faith. All our formation prepares us for the front line. Let us do all these things for the front line. It doesn't have to be a massive change at once; let us first look to the things that are possible. We can look at what we do and think, '*What now could help us prepare for that front line?*' Not turning through 90 degrees of direction, but turning through 1 degree at a time. One degree shifts are much easier than 90 degree shifts; much more possible and much less traumatic. If we keep making 1 degree shifts we can end up going in a new, hopefully more positive and constructive, direction.

We need to recognise in our churches things which drive us; which motivate us, and make our priorities; the preaching and the worship and the small groups.

We might try in a service as an interview or a short testimony *This Time Tomorrow*. A member of the congregation can describe what they will be doing on a typical Monday morning. So how does faith work there? How can we help?

The theory then, is that churches need to become the places of equipping. It needs to show the significance of the *Front Line*, to empower the members and equip them for their *Front Lines*.

Over five sessions, the course will help you to: Build strong foundations: Meet your children's needs: Set clear boundaries: Teach healthy relationships: Consider your long term aim.

The Parenting Teenagers Course was developed in 1990 by Nicky and Sila Lee (authors of [The Parenting Book](#)) for parents and care-givers looking for practical support to strengthen their family relationships.

Over five sessions, the course will help you to: Keep your long term aim in mind: Meet you teenager's needs: Set clear boundaries: Develop emotional health: Help them make good choices

There needs to be a consensus in leadership about this. If the leaders don't get it, the rest won't. If the people don't get it, it will not continue, and it will not become part of the culture of that church. We need to form a culture of our church so that these things become the part of the church for everyone.

The first priority then is to work with the core of the leadership. The leadership team, whoever they are, need to understand and agree on this. What actually happens in a church, the real culture of that church, is effectively what the core actually can agree on. That is simply a statement of fact. If what we want and what happens are not the same thing we need to ask why?

We can use downloadable sermon outlines, we can preach through these things over a period of time. It might be useful if all the churches at the same time have the same 6 sermons given by the various preachers, so that all the churches have the same message given. This could also be looked at in small groups. There is a *Fruitfulness On The Front Line*¹⁰ book for small groups and a booklet, *The Whole Of Life For Christ*.¹¹

We need to consider how we gather groups and for what purpose. We might suggest first *Life On The Frontline*¹², then following that *Fruitfulness On The Frontline*. Both are worth doing, and together if possible, but of the two, *Fruitfulness On The Frontline* stands alone better; but it will be more useful to do both.

Churches need to equip leaders; small group leaders, worship leaders, and preachers, and consider the intention for Sunday services with regards to the *Front Line*. We need to ask about how everyday life is expressed with Sunday worship, and how Sunday worship speaks to everyday life. But then to return to the idea of the 1 degree shift, looking at what we do, how we can just tweak these things bit by bit towards that *Front Line*.

It could be useful therefore to let the entire MA do this plan. This is partly a leadership issue because it is about the formation of the cultures of our churches and MA, and the first task of leadership is to form the culture, But it is also about the grass roots, the bottom up, because if there is no agreement or consensus it will not happen.

There is a creative tension between the present reality and the future reality. The leader's natural habitat is in that creative tension. A visionary leader can see where things are, and to where they will go at the present course, and can also see where things might go to at a change of course; but this change of course takes energy and intention.

Part of this energy and intention can come from a dissatisfaction of the present; the worst case being; *We're doomed unless we do something!* Another part of this energy can come from the attraction of something wonderful; *Wouldn't it be great if.....* But the attraction will not motivate unless people believe it is possible. Part of the work of the leader then is to generate a sense of possibility, which can provide that energy for change.

¹⁰ Greene, Mark; 2014; *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*; IVP.

¹¹ Antony Billington & Mark Greene; *The Whole of Life for Christ*; 2015; IVP. Including 7 studies for small groups.

¹² *Life on the Frontline* [DVD] by Neil Hudson (Actor, Host), Mark Greene (Director)