

EDITORIAL: Seven steps to making disciples

By Paul Beasley-Murray

For a number of years churches have been encouraged to draw up their own mission statements. In my own church a year or so ago we adopted, on the basis of Matt 28:19 and John 20:21, the simple slogan 'To go Christ's way and to make disciples'. This mission statement appears on our headed notepaper, on our weekly newsletter, indeed on almost everything that we produce. In this way we hope to impress upon every member of the church the ultimate purpose behind every church activity.

However, there are times when mission statements begin to lose their bite. So recently we felt that it would be helpful to spell out in black and white what we believe is involved in the discipleship process. We ended up with 'seven steps'. Let me share these seven steps with you, not with a view to making some universal statement of theological truth, but with a view to stimulating you in turn to give practical expression to your own philosophy of mission.

Seven Steps to Making Disciples

1. *Contact*
 - a. through building personal bridges of friendship
 - b. through involvement in church organisations
2. *Communication*
 - a. through personal (verbalised) witness
 - b. through regular 'seeker-friendly' services
3. *Clarification*
 - a. through one-to-one 'counselling'
 - b. through participation in an Alpha course

Conversion - this is not a 'step' which we as a church can take!

4. *Incorporation*
 - a. through baptism (confession of the faith)
 - b. through church membership (covenant community)
5. *Consolidation*
 - a. through nurture in a small group
 - b. through presenting the challenge of Christian giving

6. *Commissioning*

- a. through training in faith-sharing
- b. through encouraging service in and beyond the church

7. *Canonisation*

- a. through worship and fellowship
- b. through witness and service

Doubtless to some readers the alliteration may seem 'corny'. On the other hand, I would maintain that at the end of the day alliteration even of this kind will prove to be memorable.

I presented this seven-step philosophy to my June 'church meeting'. However, conscious that no ordinary punter absorbs any philosophy of mission on the basis of a one-off presentation, I have drawn up a Sunday preaching programme, which will give us an opportunity to expound each step on the basis of a series of seven passages of Scripture. For example:

Contact - Andrew shows the way (John 1:25-42)

Communication - Peter shows the way (Acts 2 and 1 Pet 3:15)

Clarification - Philip shows the way (Acts 8:26-40)

Incorporation - Paul shows the way (Gal 3:26-28)

Consolidation - Barnabas shows the way (Acts 4:36; 9:27; 15:36-41)

Commissioning - Jesus shows the way (Matt 5:13-16)

Canonisation - Saints of the Old Testament show the way (Hebs 12-13)

As for *Conversion*, I shall preach on Acts 16:25-34 (the jailer shows the way) within the context of a baptismal service - our hope will be that within such a setting there might well be one or two who are prompted to yield their lives to Christ!

Clearly there is always the danger of manipulating Scripture to one's own ends. But then is not this the danger of the discipline of systematic theology in general? Our aim is not to pervert Scripture, but rather to root Scripture within a practical framework in such a way that ordinary Christians can get a handle on the business of making disciples.

But what works for you? Letters and responses please!