

“THE FUNNEL OF LOVE” (sorry)



This provokes the question, do we have a balance of activities that help the many varied people who we encounter take the journey towards faith? This journey will be different for say Young at heart members as compared to Baptism families. The strategic question to ask is whether what we offer in terms of steps enables a diverse set of people to journey towards a fully committed faith in Jesus.

The framework of the funnel needs to be applied to different areas / networks and groups that St Mike's reach to see if we are making it easy for people to journey to faith, and to recognise where the gaps are. Gifts wise, we also recognise that individuals may function better at different stages of the journey, and that takes us back to our mission roles.

Individually though we might ask, what "level" event would be most helpful for my person of peace, and invite them to a suitable event.

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Our Outreach Strategy

1. Find the Person of Peace:

Working together in Mission



Person of Peace

- See
- Share
- Search
- Spend
- Show

No Interest in God > Beginning to Seek > Discovering Faith in Jesus > Growing as a Disciple

Intercessors

This strategy is based on Jesus' instructions on sending out the 70 (Luke 10), and his instruction to find the man or person of peace: Luke 10:5-6, "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you."

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SEE

Moments before Jesus has declared, *The Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few...* Do you believe that?

Which harvest field is ripe around you? The office? Your neighbours? Friends? Is it the right season in your longer term relationships? (Sometimes we find we pray for a long time for someone before the season of opportunity to share our faith crops up.) Do you get random opportunities to share your faith with passing contacts.

Our first task is to SEE the harvest field God has placed us in.

Where is your harvest field?

SHARE

Team is important: Notice how Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs – this was later true of Paul who always had a companion, we don't need to go it alone.

We can work together in groups, in teams – Small Groups working together hosting an event, or praying for each other and for those we long to see come to faith.

Who can work alongside / pray / encourage you?

SEARCH FOR THE PERSON OF PEACE

This is the heart of our strategy. Jesus tells his disciples –and us to find people of peace... In the original language he tells us, to *search out*, to *test thoroughly*, for the man of peace. Search. It's not a case of seeing if one turns up – it's about searching for them...

It's a mission to discover where God is already at work in someone's life and to develop that work by then sharing something of Jesus with them. And it's not a wild goose chase, Jesus sent out his disciples to discover what he knew was already there....

Now this puts a very different slant on how we go about sharing our faith

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On a practical level, it would be great to have a team who can take referrals, drip fed from the rest of the church, who can accompany those who are seeking faith but can't easily fit into the pattern of fixed programmes like Alpha etc.

Today, people have had all kinds of spiritual experiences, but no saving knowledge of God. Interpreters, like St Paul say, "What you worship as unknown I will make known to you!"

Apologist

People have questions, and for some the resolving of these questions can remove the barriers between them and deciding to follow Jesus. We can all work on having an answer to give for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15), but some are particularly well equipped at arguing for the Christian faith.

Such people aren't helpful at just answering the questions asked of them, but can help others who struggle to explain their belief or who feel they can't give the answers to the questions that someone might have.

3. The Structures of the Church

It's all very well discovering possible people of peace, but what do we do once we've found them? How can the church (i.e. the many different people of St Mike's, and any activities that we host) help?

Adapted from Lawrence Singlehurst's *Sowing/Reaping/Keeping* and the Mission Shaped Ministry course uses the image of a cone or funnel depicting events and activities that reach people at different stages of their journey towards faith. (see over page.) The wide end of the cone represents events etc that have minimal or no direct gospel input, and reach the maximum number of people, as the cone narrows events have more gospel input but will tend to have fewer people attending. At the narrowest point people are beginning to integrate into the life of the church.

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Fishers of Men

Jesus sends us out into all the world, that every tribe and tongue can hear the glorious message of the gospel. The truth is that 95% of the population are not followers of Jesus, and if we're honest – there are great swathes of people who have no real connection with his church. Yet, the truth remains that God is still at work in peoples' lives, we are a more spiritually open generation than before.

Like St Paul, fishers of men, seek to make contact with those who have no contact with the gospel, and make the good news of Jesus known.

Networkers / Mixers

Immediately after converting, the tax collector Matthew hosted a huge "party for Jesus" to which his friends, colleagues and accomplices were welcomed. It strikes me that Matthew was great at connecting people with others that would help faith to flourish.

Mixers may not themselves have all the answers but are great at helping those who are beginning to search to connect with others who might help them. Networkers are essential links in the chain and can help seekers move from one stage of their journey to another.

Prophets

Power evangelism, Prophetic evangelism – the label has varied through the years, but one biblical pattern of people coming to faith was out of an experience of the Power of God. The "prophet" in this regard is one who makes Christ known to the unbeliever through an openness to power of God in prayer, healing and prophetic insight.

Interpreters

"How can I know, unless someone explains it to me?" says the Eunuch in Acts 8. Philip, who has drawn alongside his chariot, gets in and opens the gospel to him. They only shared part of the journey together, but it made an eternal difference. Interpreters are those who draw close for a time, before moving to focus on other relationships God is at working in.

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in Jesus. Our task isn't one of manoeuvring the unwilling into a corner so we can bash them with a Bible into submission (top tip – it doesn't work), our job is to have our spiritual eyes open, and help those who are open...

What a great prayer before we head out each day to ask, "Lord, bring into my path a person of peace, and give me grace and courage to speak your words to this person."

Who might be your person of peace?

SPEND—TIME

Concentrate your faith sharing with those who are receptive, who are open, who are interested. Find someone who likes you and start there!

When you've found your person of peace, Jesus' instruction is to stay with them, accept their hospitality. Basically we should prioritise and invest in the relationship that God is moving in! Chat, have coffee, a pint, invite them to stuff etc etc

Which relationships do you need to prioritise for the gospel's sake?

SHOW

In his instructions Jesus gives the task of sharing the good news with the person of peace. If you think you know a person of peace then be brave and share something of your faith with them.

He also says the person of peace will *welcome you* (Mt 10:14), *Listen to you* (Lu 10:16) and serve or support you... It isn't a one sided relationship.

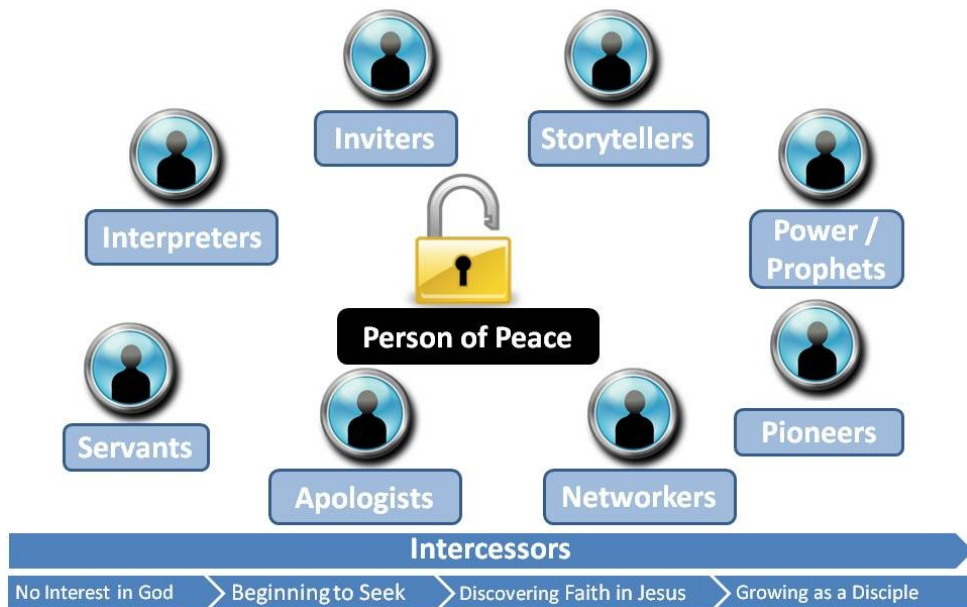
Here it is helpful to perhaps share your testimony, (your own experience of God) or a basic explanation of your faith. If you feel ill-equipped to do that, then why not invite your Person of peace to events or places when they will meet others who can encourage them further.

Who welcomes and listens to you?

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2. Using our gifts—working together as a team

Working together in Mission



The foundation of the work we share is that of prayer. Of all we can do prayer alone is effective in taking people on a journey from disinterest to commitment in Christ. Prayer is the foundation, prayer invokes the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer unites us as a team in mission.

From there we can each use our God given gifts to each play our part to take someone along the journey of disinterest to commitment. Sometimes one person may lead someone through to commitment, more often it takes many. We each have a part to play.

Inviters

“Come and see...” says Philip to Nathanael, inviting him to meet with Jesus, and find out more. It is worth noting that at that stage, Philip barely knew Jesus and his theology was incomplete. Indeed he couldn't

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even answer Nathanael's question, “Nazareth, can anything good come from there?” All he could do was respond, “Come and see...”

We may not feel we have all, or any of the answers, but we can all be Philips, indeed many are so very good at it, drawing and inviting in those outside to hear more of the love of Jesus.

Story-tellers

“The man who told me everything I ever did.” The example of the Samaritan Woman (John 4) is one of testimony. She returns to the village sharing about her encounter with Jesus, and this intrigues, inspires and draws out many to come and find out more.

In an age where many struggle with truth, the logical arguments of doctrine often don't unlock the door of someone's heart. Instead the story of God at work in our lives does. It needn't be flashy or amazing; people live with everyday concerns, so to hear how our faith makes a difference in the day to day can be a real open-door for someone to look more deeply.

Servants

When Jesus wrapped the towel around his waist he set an example of servanthood that the church was ever to follow. It was St Francis of Assisi who said, Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.

A servant is someone who through their actions and care for others demonstrate the love of God. This can be embodied corporately in acts of service to communities – but the essence is the same, Glory is given to God. Thus, when a servant is praised for their kindness, they don't absorb the thanks for themselves but are quick to respond it is an expression of God's love, as it is him they are serving too. Jesus summed it up like this, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

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