

Tim Scheuer's Announcement at the Church Army 75th Anniversary Conference Kihilla, Lawson, September 2009

Introduction

I want to share with you about an interesting turn that has taken place in my spiritual journey this year. This turn has resulted in much prayer, reflection, counsel and some decisions.

Positive Inspiration

For the past several years those who know me would know that I have been very keen to see new disciples of Jesus made through the planting of new churches/fresh expressions/local mission bases. Increasingly I have been motivated to explore ways we can multiply these new faith communities so that we would see larger numbers of Australians experiencing the life and liberty that Jesus has made possible through his death and resurrection. I have consistently stated that the deepest issues that face Australians, of every colour, can only be resolved through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ; individually and communally. I believe this stuff! I have experienced His power transforming me, and have had the privilege of seeing the power of the gospel impact individuals, families, groups and communities – especially among “the worst”.

In late March this year I took the opportunity to spend three days with a Kiwi missionary that we'll call Barney. Barney has spent the past 12 years serving in China in “Church Planting Movements”; seeing hundreds of small simple churches planted and thousands of people coming to Christ in relatively short periods of time.

The first thing Barney did when he stood up in front of the small group of leaders I was part of was to ask a question; “Do you believe God wants many people saved now?” And then he paused...

I sat there thinking, “If I say, ‘no’, it will be very hard to justify that ‘no’ from scripture. But, if I say ‘yes’... I sensed there would be more questions coming, confronting questions. At the same time I knew that what God was saying to me could not be brushed off by explaining to him that I was the National Director of Church Army Australia and that we were planting LMB's, training local missionaries and running a good residential restoration programme. “Hey God, I'm a busy religious guy doing good things – off my back” was not going to wash...

What particularly struck me about my 3 days with Barney was learning how the things he was doing were so simple and basic; and yet bearing so much fruit. He had us organise and practice our own faith story and make a list of 100 non-believers that we knew (I got to 33), group them in groups of five, and prioritise for sharing with those on the list. The whole experience really rattled me and I felt I needed to obey, to begin to do the simple things I was not doing. God used Barney to highlight these things.

When I left Melbourne I was both excited and scared. Excited because I felt Barney had helped connect some dots for me in the area of multiplication movements, and scared, because I felt God was going to hold me accountable for this new understanding.

Upon returning I immediately began to share what I had heard but felt I needed to find a context to put this new understanding into practice. Five weeks later I started 3 days a week in Airds. Airds tops the list of suburbs in the Sydney region in socio-economic disadvantage. In 5 weeks a lot happened to make a way... my role was restructured, money raised, team recruited, board support, bishop's blessings, parish permission and business manager recruited.

Almost immediately this new understanding began to bear fruit and it was fun; energising. People were coming to faith, some were immediately winning others to Christ and I was training a number of groups in the T4T process. Momentum was building...

A second significant thing happened for me in August. I spent 3 days with another CPM practitioner. Jeff has been based in Nepal for the past 10 years. He told me that in the past 10 years he has had a part in 7 separate CPM's. Jeff has recently returned to his native USA, and, much to his surprise, is beginning to see similar things take root there.

Prior to attending this most recent training I felt I had a good handle on the principles and processes of modern CPM's. However, I discovered many more dots needed to be connected.

I heard Jeff telling a story about a CPM sceptic. His response to the sceptic was, "Prove to me it won't work in your context. In order to prove it won't work I want you to train 1000 people in the T4T process." I thought instantly, "that's what I must do – I must attempt to prove that this won't work in Australia – in order to give it a fair shot I will endeavour to train 1000 people."

In recent months I have learned some things that have greatly inspired me. For instance, in China in 1949 there were approximately 700,000 Christians. By 2003 that number had grown to 70,000,000. Since 2003 the number of Christians has exploded to 130,000,000 (reported in October 2008). What is the explanation of such exponential growth? The answer: CPM's led by people like John Chen.

I have been reading John Chen's case study and learning about his simple methods of teaching new believers obedience to Christ based on 2 Timothy 2:2. I have been introduced to him via email. He began in November 2001 in a province with 20,000,000 people. Jeff was with John Chen 7 months ago and told me that the movement has now exceeded 2.5 million baptised believers, and he never preaches a sermon! There's just two kinds of people...

CPM's are springing up all over the developing world, including among Muslims, and millions, literally millions, are coming to Christ. Can this happen in places like Australia? I feel compelled to find out...

The great Christian revolutions come not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when somebody takes radically something that was always there (Richard Neibuhr).

Negative Preparation

A Definition: “Negative preparation involves God’s use of events, people, conflict, persecution, and experiences that focus on the negative, in order to free a person from the present situation to enter the next phase of development with revitalized interest. The emphasis is not on escaping, but on release and on preparation to accept a new situation with an abandonment that would not otherwise be there.”

Simultaneously, along with *Positive Inspiration*, some *Negative Preparation* processing has been happening in me. Increasingly I have been finding difficulty in adequately shouldering my roles and responsibility as National Director of Church Army. It has been hard to attend to the needs of a growing organisation that is becoming more complex and head up a frontline mission effort in Airds.

Surely, available “time” is an issue, but it’s not just “time”. I am discovering that much of what is required to take the organisation forward; I do not have in the tank. My gift-mix, experience and temperament are limited and I am finding are not quite what is required to lead Church Army into its next phase of growth.

As I have reflected on my transition from Church Army Branson 7 years ago it is clear that I was the right person to pioneer that base; establish a clear focus and DNA, but I wasn’t the person able to take the ministry to the expanded fruitfulness that it now enjoys.

I celebrate the growing understanding that God seems to use me to punch big holes in walls... Some of those big holes have been our renewed focus on reaching the least, the last and the lost. The establishment of Local Mission Bases, a new training curriculum in Local Mission with delivery options such as GGY and SOLM, Kihilla Restoration and now Koolamon Restoration, Kihilla as our National Centre, and the new Endorsement Policy which provides flexibility and diversity for people to be connected with Church Army.

But, I am not a framing carpenter who can bring the necessary shape and order to those big holes. In that sense, the negative preparation processing I have been experiencing (I don’t need to go into detail), has helped me realise that I think my season as ND has run its course.

I see a fresh wall, and I believe God is calling me to punch some big holes in it...

Decision

After much prayer, discussion with my wife and family, the board of Church Army, and other counsellors I have made the decision to resign from my position as National Director, effective February 2010.

However, I feel my call to Church Army is a life-long call. Our board chairman, Bishop Stuart Robinson, has suggested I embrace a new role within Church Army as Director of CPM’s. I am very keen to embrace this challenge. Beginning next February I will spend more time in Airds working to prove that Church Planting Movements won’t work in Australia. I will also be working with others (within and outside Church Army), training those keen to help me prove this. My goal is to train 1000 in the T4T process.

The board has appointed a reference team made up of Church Army Officers and board members. They have already begun the task of mapping out a process for appointing a new National Director. They will guide this process and together we will pray for the right man or woman, with the right gift-mix, experience and temperament to fill this role at this stage of our growth.

One thing the board has made abundantly clear is that they have every intention of appointing a new leader who will continue to direct Church Army along its current trajectory.

Conclusion

Last week I was re-reading some Church Army history. I read the words spoken by the Public Orator about Wilson Carlile when he was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Divinity at Oxford in 1915. I quote:

“And yet for the man before you today it can most truly be claimed in no figure of speech that he is a leader on an army in war. We hear it often said... that everyone who professes the Christian faith is a soldier; this man has made real what other men have only talked about. He has raised an army to fight against the many miseries of human life; he wages daily warfare against those sins which are sometimes the causes and sometimes the results of poverty and want. He has helped some who suffer for no fault of their own; he has stopped others in their downward course; he has given to many the opportunity of making one more effort and of restoring their ruined lives.”

He has raised an army to fight... we are part of that army that Carlile has raised up. That is why we are targeting the spiritually darkest places across Australia. I am committed to this cause!

He has given to many the opportunity... we believe and know that lost people matter to God.

Of making one more effort and of restoring their ruined lives – we believe that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes... of which, we are not ashamed!

I would value your support and your blessing as I prepare to step down as National Director and embrace this fresh pioneering challenge. I also would request your prayer and support as the board searches for a new National Director to guide the Church Army into its next phase of growth.

I also would treasure the opportunity to share with those interested, more of the journey I have been on, and the things I believe God is teaching me as I lead the new initiative in Airds.

Capt. Tim Scheuer