

Tracy Cotterell & Neil Hudson: Leading a whole-life discipling Church

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Notes by Alison Morgan, July 2012

Both authors are from LICC.

1. Embracing whole-life mission

The usual pattern of mission is that a church leader leads his people into engagement with the community. This uses time and resources, and is very tiring. For the church leader it's a full time occupation; for the church members it's not; they have busy lives with many demands, and it's a part time activity. It is not true that busy church members need to find more time to be engaged in mission – what they need to do is find out what God wants them to do where they already are, and learn to be missionary followers of Jesus in the demanding circumstances of home, work, family and friendships.

For the LICC the central question is this: how can we reach the UK?

'The UK will never be reached until we begin to cultivate open, authentic, learning and praying communities that are focused on making whole-life disciples who live and share the gospel wherever they relate to people in their daily lives.'p4

People have been encouraged but not equipped to do this. Most are happy to support the mission activity of the church, but less confident in knowing what mission would look like in their office, school, club or home. In 2010 the 3rd Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism asked people what their primary mission strategy was. Most said it was a leisure time strategy, based on recruiting the people of God to use some of their leisure time to join the missionary initiatives of church-paid workers. It's been fruitful – but is incomplete as a strategy. It results in mission that most Christians can only participate in during evenings and weekends – it's a tragic waste of potential. It's a minister-centric, leisure-time mission model.

To get out of this model two things are necessary:

- a culture shift that orients the life and mission of the church round whole life discipling
- a renegotiation of the 'pastoral contact' so that a new pastoral care and equipping model emerges

From 2007 to 2010 LICC followed 16 churches through this shift.

2. Perspectives to shape a whole-life church

Disciples grow when they are engaged in mission – you cannot truly grow as a disciple without a context for mission. You might grow in understanding scripture or in confidence around church activities, but to be a follower of Jesus you have to be aware of God's purposes for the world and your part in them. Whole life discipling has to be gospel shaped. 'It is possible for leaders to inadvertently leave people with an impression that God could do more if only we were busier' – but mission and discipling are not a call to increased activity, they are a response to the primary action of God. 'The degree to which we are able to help cradle-born consumers become Christ-shaped disciples will be determined by .. the extent to which such disciples see themselves as agents of God's whole mission in all the places they find themselves.'

40% of Christians surveyed at Spring Harvest 2009 did not feel confident in applying the implications of their faith to their everyday life. Whole life discipling is a long haul, and involves attentiveness to God and to others.

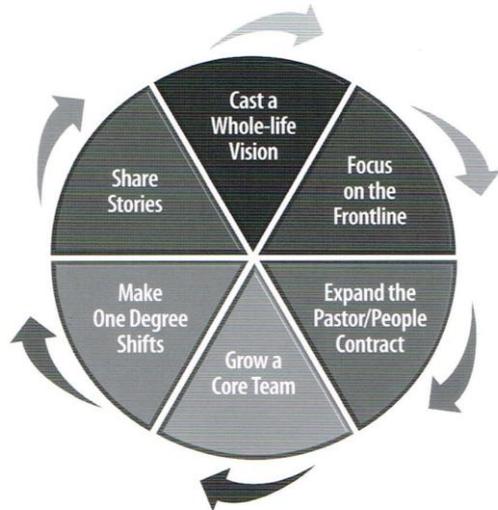
Church helps people change. A leader's concern for the church family is for the kind of people they are becoming and for the difference they make in the world.

The challenge is the culture rather than programmes. Emphasis on the centrality of discipleship is growing across the UK. WE need to move beyond discipleship programmes to a church culture where whole life discipling is central. It's about the whole church, and the way it does everything.

3. Leading a church into whole life discipleship

There are 6 dynamics in a change process which achieves this:

1. Cast a vision – preaching plays an essential part in cultivating a hunger for whole life mission. Scripture actually says far more about families and daily interaction in scripture than there is about worship. Scripture was offered to help us live faithful lives in inhospitable places.
2. Focus on the frontline – places where people spend most of their time and have most contact with non Christians.
3. Expand the pastor-people contract – you want them to complain not that you haven't visited them but that you haven't equipped them to live as a follower of Jesus in their daily lives.
4. Grow a core team of clergy and laity who will model it
5. Make one-degree shifts – if you set off in an even slightly different direction you will arrive in a radically different place.
6. Share stories – as leaders, spend time with your ordinary members, not just the ones who run things, the ones who need support, the non church members who come for occasional offices etc. Try eg This Time Tomorrow.



4. Where next?

This is a spiritual challenge – embrace it everywhere, in prayer, study, home groups, business meetings. Help people recognise their front lines and live fruitfully there in every way you can.