



## Worksheet 7: Evangelism

### Evangelism: Yes or No?

Until recent years the answer seemed quite clear. Evangelism, simply stated, was about the winning of people to Jesus Christ. In our multi-faith society the idea of converting someone seems to be an imperialistic act, an expression of intolerance towards other people's beliefs. Where then does the church stand in relation to evangelism in the 21st century?



### What is the Church's calling?

As part of the mission of God (*missio Dei*) the church is called to share and celebrate the joy and love of God in the world. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit it testifies to what God has accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In conformity with God's mission, the church is called to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sin, and do the work of justice. In this task the church calls others to live under Jesus' Lordship, to lives of committed discipleship, *for* his Kingdom and *against* all false claimants and saviours (Acts 4: 12; 1 Tim. 2: 5). In worship, prayer and service, the church is called to witness both personally and politically to God's Reign in the world (1 Pt. 2: 9).

### What is evangelism?

The word 'evangel' comes from the New Testament Greek word *euaggelion*, translated as 'gospel.' In the New Testament it referred first to the good news that Jesus preached concerning the Reign of God (Mk 1: 15) and later in apostolic preaching to the good news about Jesus. In the multicultural and pluralist world of the early Christians, the gospel contained the subversive announcement that salvation and forgiveness came uniquely through what God had done in Jesus' life, death and resurrection; that redemption and ultimate meaning was to be found in devotion to his person alone (Col. 1: 19-20). For those who believed, this new way of living became real through Jesus' Lordship and the radical reorientation of their lives lived in costly discipleship (Mk 8: 34; 1 Jn 5: 12).

### Questions

- How did you hear the good news and respond to it?
- If evangelism is an expression of the church's true identity, can a church without evangelism be an authentic church?
- Do you think that your congregation is suffering from 'Conversion Aversion'? If so, in what ways and what are the causes?
- How is baptism related to the call to repentance and conversion?
- Why do we need both personal and political conversion?



#### Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the National Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: [www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine).

“GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WHOLE CREATION.”

## Quotes

A church which is not as such an evangelising church is either not yet or no longer the church, or only a dead church, itself standing in supreme need of renewal by evangelisation.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1V/3, 2, p. 874

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No Christian solidarity with the poor can exist which does not point to the totality of the kingdom promises, including the invitation to personal faith and witness.

Emilio Castro, *Sent Free*, p. 101

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Evangelism is about the participation of the whole local congregation in Christ's mission in the world. When we faithfully worship we proclaim Christ, when we pray we proclaim Christ: every part of the life and work of the congregation has evangelistic meaning. Each believing community must tell out the gospel, giving it verbal expression and making it visible.

Felix Snattmann, *Jesus and Discipleship Evangelism*, p. 77



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## True to the way of Jesus

Evangelism is that non-coercive practice in which the church as the community of Jesus and in acknowledgement of his Lordship, embodies and proclaims the love and saving grace of the triune God. It does this in following Jesus' way in its witness, worship and service. Bound to the way and purposes of the crucified One, the church must never allow its evangelistic practices to be predatory or violent, but always wanting the ultimate welfare of the 'other.' Evangelism is to be distinguished from 'proselytism' in that it takes place in faith sharing episodes that are separate from coercion. Every evangelistic endeavor must be reflective of God's self-giving in Jesus (1 Cor. 2: 2). Evangelism's task is to make the 'other' lovingly aware of what has been graciously given to the church for the sake of the world.

Therefore a Christian is most evangelical when he or she is true to the way of Jesus, true to his nonviolent Kingdom purposes. The most evangelistic thing that the church can do is to be the Body of Christ. By faithfully being the church in praise and petition, the church indicates to itself and to the world who is at the centre of its life and to whom it looks for ultimate meaning (Eph. 1: 11-12). The church's evangelistic work must never be adrift from this theological foundation. Because of this, evangelism must never condone life under any 'alien' Lordship. Nor must it occasion feverish sales talk issuing forth in 'cheap grace' and 'easy believing'.

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## Every believer a witness

Through the missional words of Jesus to his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16: 15; Mt. 28: 18-20; Lk. 24: 47; Jn 20: 21-23; 2 Cor. 5: 19f), the evangelistic commission is placed on every church member. While the New Testament is clear that certain persons fulfill different functions within the church, the church's evangelistic task belongs to all Christians who are empowered by the Spirit of Jesus to be his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1: 8). It is the calling of each believer as the overflow of their grateful worship of God. The church in its understanding of evangelism needs to recover the insight that faithful worship of the crucified and risen Christ is evangelistic. It empowers personal witness and testimony. Evangelical worship proclaims God's Word and is never without reference to the world for which Jesus lived and died.

Evangelism then is a gospel imperative. It comes about through the Holy Spirit's invitation to join with the incarnate and crucified Christ in the transformation of the world.

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## Books to read

Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*

Walter Klieber, *Call and Response*

William Abrahams, *The Logic of Evangelism*

N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, rev. ed.

Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian?*