**Raising Up People for Gospel Ministry**

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**Introduction**

This paper explores five Biblical principles for raising up people for gospel ministry. Each principle builds on the previous one. Gospel workers are people, and these principles are also organic; they are not merely functional (ie. “if you build it, they will come”). In my re-imagining, as these principles mature in the existing gospel workers they would bear the fruit of another generation of gospel workers.

As we are re-imagining in the Melbourne Anglican context, I will let this set the definition for gospel ministry. To this end, I will focus the reimagining to ordained positions. This is not to say that gospel ministry is only ordained ministry. However, our whole Anglican tradition would need to be re-imagined if we removed ordination! So, with these realities in mind, I set this limit.

The five principles are: prayer; all backgrounds got gospel workers, an emphasis on character, the importance of treasure, partnership.

1. **Prayer**

“Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest” (Matthew 9:37; Luke 10:2).

The obvious must still be stated. The basic work for raising up people for gospel ministry is prayer. The principle work of prayer as the basis of raising up people:

* deals with our pride which always wants to be the focus of achievement.
* stops us from being the one who ultimately select the person because the Lord is in charge.
* allows the number of workers to be sent to be greater than our capability; I am praying for more than the ones I know and with whom I am involved.

Prayer means:

* that we submit ourselves to the Lord of the harvest and so it is always his work.
* the sending out of workers is an act of discipleship because even my plans are submitted to the Lord.
* We can know the loving care of the Lord when we feel the burden that there are few workers.
* my striving in the grace of God; the way the Lord of the harvest has specifically asked me to devote time.

How do we reimagine this principle in our current context? The “fields are ripe for harvest” for the same reason as always: people are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:37). Prayer must not in its essence be reimagined; we must simply pray.

I have noted that there are small pockets of people praying for the Lord to send out workers. Is there a way to bring together these groups? It would require someone in particular to communicate with the groups to unite them. Since our focus is the Anglican context, can the cathedral play a central role as meeting place? Would those of us already ordained, commit a day per month to meet at the cathedral to pray?

As is often mentioned, Jesus asks the ones he is about to send out to pray. Are our prayer meetings only gathering those already in “gospel ministry”? Who are we inviting to pray with us? Is the time of meeting to pray conducive to others joining?

1. **All backgrounds for gospel workers**

Jesus made the point of raising up gospel workers from all kinds of demographics and the early church continued in this vein: fishermen, tax collectors, Pharisees, prostitutes, zealots, tent makers, household stewards, rich women, demon possessed, lepers.

It seems to me that this principle has been lost. In the Anglican church the path requires all gospel workers to be able to complete a university level degree. We are grateful for the “Pauls” of the church, but do we celebrate the “Peters” in the same way?

What if we were to rethink the category of deacon? The first step might be to enlarge how a deacon functions. Yes, present on Sunday, serving the community with possibly gifts of teaching. But perhaps for the rest of the week, this person continued as, say, a child care worker. This person has been ordained as a deacon because they clearly live out the gospel, they are seen to be growing in godliness and fulfill the general lists of the qualities of a deacon in the New Testament. Perhaps this person has gifts of evangelism or pastoral care. However, to send that person into a university context would not fit necessarily fit their nature. Maturing in the role would mean participating in appropriate training and continuing to grow in life and doctrine.

This does not mean the that ordained role of presbyter must require a university degree. I am currently working in a context in which a university degree can be seen as a negative, especially if the person with the degree lacks emotional and cultural intelligence. It may well be that over time the deacon, say after 5 years, has naturally come to a point where the church would ask for that person to consider moving out of child care into the role of presbyter within the community because the gifts they have demonstrated have borne fruit.

The call of Scripture is for godly wisdom, not human intelligence. Has the way we identify and equip gospel workers lost this principle? I would say yes. Let’s re-imagine a future where the importance of handling God’s word well is maintained and individuals are equipped for this in appropriate ways.

1. **An emphasis on character**

The principle of workers from wider backgrounds would also feed into this next principle. Jesus’s key problem with the Pharisees was their hypocrisy, that their words and actions did not line up (Matthew 23). This is an issue of character, the kind of person I am. This is picked up in the early church when the seven are chosen to wait on tables (Acts 6:3), or in the qualities of a deacon or presbyter (1 Timothy 3).

How do we re-imagine this in our current society? It seems to me that the world is crying out for people of true character. It is a rebuke to the church that Christian leaders are not known for their character above all. So, this principle must start with the current gospel workers. As with the earlier principle, although academic ability can be important, character must be of first importance, always. Too many times the phrase “but he’s a good man” is used to describe someone academically bright or theologically sharp, even though his character comes under question. This should not be possible.

Perhaps it’s the personal integrity of the current gospel workers that causes few to be raised up? Are we known for “love”; is our personal discipleship to Jesus attractive? Paul has no qualms in saying “Follow my example as I follow Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:1). Could we who are gospel workers say this of our example?

The church needs heroes of the faith. Have we have settled for heroes like the Greco-Roman world, demigods who all have character flaws. Jesus’ character stood out to the crowds, and still does. That’s also what should make current gospel workers stand out. Would there be more gospel workers if we moved from a heavy bias to academic ability and recalibrated this with an emphasis on godliness borne from personal discipleship?

1. **The importance of treasure**

Jesus expects gospel workers to live simpler lives. Jesus demonstrated this in his own life and in his sending out of the disciples in the first mission (Matthew 10:10). It was also continued in the early church. Paul could say that he has learned contentment in all circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13).

It is often said that current western culture owes its whole basis to the person of Jesus. In the spaces where it does not owe its values to Jesus, should not the church look different? To put it bluntly: is there a qualitative and quantitative difference in the material expression of gospel workers and the world?

Reimagining this principle through a rubric of levels of wealth and poverty would be unhelpful. We must approach this situation like Jesus. Perhaps the most famous reflection on this is in Luke 12, where Jesus focuses on priority: seek the kingdom and all these things will be given to us as well (clothes, food, the material). Do we truly treasure belonging to the Kingdom of God? Are current gospel workers content because we already have true treasure?

Perhaps the first step is for current gospel workers to give serious attention to what it means to be godly with contentment. Would we wrestle this through at conferences and in professional development? I do not think can do this alone. Yet, it is rarely talked about. Stipends are set with an eye on the world and the concept that “a worker is worth his wages” (1 Timothy 5:18). But is that what Paul really meant? Does not greed start with being dissatisfied? In a world of greed and discontent in what ways are current gospel workers offering an attractive alternative of contentment, together.

Are gospel workers known for their contentment? To borrow a worldly term, obvious “job satisfaction” would raise up more gospel workers.

1. **Partnership**

This leads to the final principle of working together. Too much of the current expression of gospel work is done in isolation, on one’s own turf. Yet, the concept of team work is prevalent throughout the New Testament (eg. Philippians 1:3-11). It is impossible to express Christian love in isolation.

In saying this, I do not necessarily mean what is referred to as team ministry, ie. in one location. Working together might not necessarily mean in the same location. The breaking down of denominational loyalty has already led to this kind of partnership, between individual churches.

How could this be reimaged? I think by intensity. The current model of deanery could be re-worked. Rather than being determined by location, what if it was based on mutual trust and affection? What if the deanery was a place where lives of gospel workers are truly shared? This would mean that it needed to be a weekly meeting for at least a couple of hours. It would need to involve table fellowship. It would be a place where the gospel worker could truly share burdens (even sin), and find refreshment and restoration for the soul.

How would this raise up more gospel workers? Firstly, by reducing attrition of current gospel workers. Secondly, I suspect as the gospel worker is nourished in a place of trust and mutual love, this will be seen and expereinced by the wider Christian community, allowing others to know that being a gospel worker is a great blessing from the Lord.

**Conclusion**

Reimagining raising up people for gospel ministry starts with those already in gospel ministry (defined narrowly here as ordained Anglicans):

* Are we praying as a discipline for more workers and with protentional workers?
* Have we an understanding as broad as Jesus of who could be in gospel ministry?
* Is our personal godliness attractive?
* Are we content because we have real treasure?
* Do we work together on all these areas in a place of trust and mutual affection?

May the Lord send out more workers into his harvest field.

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