

# The heart of our mission



Laurence Singlehurst writes



Mission isn't an activity or a programme. It is a question and the question is how big are our hearts . . . .

The challenge facing the Church today is this – how we can see the Christian message impact our nation and how we can see individuals touched by God's love? The challenge of the Church is to be missional.

What we know traditionally is that mission is done by leaders and enthusiastic church members and expresses itself through church projects – mothers and toddlers groups and many other ideas. Sometimes mission expresses itself as something we call evangelism which conjures up pictures of standing on street corners proclaiming the Christian message. What we can be certain of is that as long as this remains our framework for being missional we will not change our nation.

## Reaching out with hope

We have to see some major changes, where mission becomes something that every church member embraces and that the word evangelism has a much more helpful meaning and is a part of our overall concept of reaching out. The good news is there are many new things happening around the country to help us. The Hope '08 initiative under the Hope banner of 'do more together in word and action' had a powerful impact.

Through Hope '08 many churches found new ways to do mission and were much encouraged that action is a part of mission. The Hope initiative is going to continue up to 2014 (see also page 6) and will continue to resource ([www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk)).

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

## 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15

But how does this work for ordinary church members, how do we mobilise? I wrote a book in 1995 called *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping* which laid out some ideas of how we could all be missional, but as I released a second edition a few years ago, I had a strange feeling that there had been some mistakes in the first edition and that I needed to see mission in a new way.

So often we see mission as an activity, a new programme and we are looking for a wonderful method,

but in reality mission isn't a method it's a question and the question is – how big is our heart? John 3:16 does not say God so hated the world that He sent His son to judge it, but God so loved the world. So mission for God begins in His heart and Christ out of His love for us dies on the cross. The big challenge that faces us all is how big is our heart.

## Finding it difficult to love

I had an experience as a young Christian where I needed to care for a little boy who was soaked in urine and was very difficult to love and I found it impossible to pick this boy up. But a wise Christian saw that I found it difficult to love and took me to 2 Corinthians 5:14 where it says that Christ died for all and she said to me 'Laurence you'll never love people until you see their value, how important they really are.' Secondly verse 16 says to no longer look at people from a worldly perspective. Our normal inclination is to look from the outside to the inside, but we need to learn how to see people the other way round. Thirdly Jesus died for us, which was a choice, and in the end we need to make choices as well, based upon a different value and a different perspective.

I believe that if we as Christians can have a new passion for people

then mission will no longer be an obligation – a method – something we feel pushed into. Instead it will be something that we want to do and the methods become resources to help us become more effective.

### Pastoring the unchurched

Having realised the importance of having a big heart at the heart of our missional strategies, it is also perhaps useful to look for metaphors that help us communicate this change in the practical way we as churches do mission. Firstly, we might like to think about an average church member. Ed Silvoso – a well known evangelist – put this thought to a conference many years ago, ‘Why doesn’t every Christian think of themselves as a pastor with a congregation not of fellow Christians but unchurched folk?’

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

**John 3: 16-18**

So if every Christian had a small congregation of three people where they live, three where they work, or four where they work and one where they live, then they do the two things that pastors do which is: love people unconditionally regardless of whether they respond or not, and secondly, seek their spiritual welfare. That way suddenly the whole church is involved in mission.

Another metaphor that is perhaps helpful is to think about how many hands we are holding as a church or how far does the love of our church go. So, if we imagine for a moment that we are a church of 100 and every member is a pastor to the unchurched – maybe with three folk locally – then we are holding between us 300 hands and that is how far the love of our church is going. If we then add to that the projects that we are involved in as a church, be

it mums and toddlers or whatever, that might add another 200 hands that we are holding and altogether 500 people are being affected by our church.

Now we could ask ourselves a question that missionaries ask themselves. What is the level of spiritual openness within the environment in which we are working? For example, if you are working in Japan missionaries think that only 1% of the population is open and this relates to the church going attendance; it gives us a measure. If you were in America it might be 30% to 40%. Some South American or African countries might be slightly more. So the question might be what is the level of spiritual openness in the UK? Our church attendance is somewhere around 8% so we could perhaps argue that for every 100 people there are five to ten spiritually open folk with whom the Spirit of God has been engaging through relationships, through prayer, through life. Now at first glance this might seem a little depressing. In fact it is not because, if you are a church of 100 holding 300 hands and you saw 10% come to faith on a per annum basis, that is 30 a year, you would double the size of your church in three years. If it is 5% you would double in six years. In either way I think we would be very excited about this.



### Extending our hands

So what is the catch? The simple reality for many British churches is that we are just not holding enough hands, the love of our churches just does not go far enough. If we are holding less than 100 hands we are in all probability winning as many people as we are losing through the natural attrition that every church faces with people moving on etc.

continued on page 6 ➤



### St Bega at Bassenthwaite

by **Martyn Halsall**

Perhaps she came by water, these same crags shielding her crossing; perhaps she smiled to see another person, waving welcome, blessing. Perhaps lake high from winter, beech in bud about to break out into psalms of leaves.

Perhaps she landed close to where the church named after her has cradled centuries' prayer, stopping to fill her palm, remembering wounds mingling of blood and rain, remembering words for shoreline safely gained, arrival's grace.

Perhaps she came in such late Easter season noting first sipping swifts, lambs' stilted steps, shadows' skimmed shivers, breeze quickening for a shower; Skiddaw's snowed rafters and its guy rope becks, trod meadows' levels ramped steep into woods.

Perhaps she lingered, seeking a wide, flat stone as bishop's seat or stall on the damp bank, and let prayer form itself, out of the dusk; watched changing charts of light guiding the hills, felt sun snuffed behind crags, a chill of doubt.

Perhaps the immediate shared its parables; a stick she'd picked for fire as clue to beam for chapel door, slate pebble a guiding step, firm ground where journey changed from field to nave, puddle made font; quick stream a canticle.

Perhaps today she'd read prayers pilgrims leave with pencil names, addresses from far away beyond her imagination; thanks, requests, cancer concern, some healing of dark pasts; perhaps reply, through stones named after her.

**Martyn Halsall** lives and writes in rural West Cumbria. A former Guardian journalist, he now works as a Communications Adviser in the Church of England. He is a former winner of the Jack Clemo Poetry Competition and poetry editor of Third Way.

*St Bega was a 7th century Irish princess, who fled from her homeland to avoid an unwelcome marriage. She landed on the Cumbrian coast at St Bede's. According to legend she eventually settled at Bassenthwaite where an idyllic lakeside church (pictured) is dedicated to her.*



continued from page 5

There is another major issue we might want to think about which is to understand that perhaps mission has gone from a decision based approach to a process. In the 1950's in England we were a country where many people had been to Sunday school, where there was a strong Christian moral framework in the country and a latent understanding of what Christianity was.

His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

**Ephesians: 15-18**

Therefore evangelism and mission were quite proclamatory and it was reasonable to expect people to make a decision to be an active Christian. Now we live in a very different world – hardly anybody goes to Sunday school – we no longer have such a strong Christian framework and much of the population do not have enough understanding to become a Christian if they were hearing the Christian message. Even worse, the language that many of us have traditionally used to describe the Christian message in terms of vocabulary – born again, saved, repent, sin etc. are words that many people have no understanding about whatsoever.


## The journey to Christ

This then leads us to another important thought where we need to think more about process and journey and is that most people need to go on a journey which helps them to understand what Christianity really means. They in all probability need to go on a journey starting from a fairly negative picture of God and Christians to a positive picture which hopefully will then empower them to make decisions to follow Christ for themselves.

In the Parable of the Sower we are told that the seed falling on good soil are like those who not only hear the word but understand it and this process, this journey is the journey of understanding.

## Sowing, reaping keeping

Now what will this journey look like? In my book, *Sowing Reaping Keeping*, I break this journey into three stages. *Sowing 1* – which is about God is good and Christians are OK focusing on relationships and good works in a society where people are cynical about words. They need to see a certain amount of deed and action and reality. Having seen that they are perhaps ready to go to the next stage called *Sowing 2* – which is an opportunity to express spiritual hunger and hear the content of the Gospel with no sense that they have to respond. And the last part of this journey I call *Reaping 3* where they have an opportunity to respond and obviously Alpha has played a key part in reaching ears and helping people understand and respond.

Then, lastly, we need to think how do we keep folk, how do they connect to the body of Christ and to our churches? 

### about the writer

**Laurence Singlehurst** has served 28 years with Youth With A Mission, 12 of them as National Director. He is also Director of Cell UK Ministries ([www.celluk.org](http://www.celluk.org)). Laurence is a regular speaker at major events. He specialises in understanding the post-modern culture and how to evangelise and disciple in that context. He is the author of a number of books including *Sowing, reaping, keeping: people sensitive evangelism* (IVP). He is married to Ailish and they have three children.



**Roy Crowne**, Director of HOPE Together writes

Even in our ever-changing, confusing and uncertain times, there are plenty of opportunities to ground the next generation in the unchanging truth of the Gospel and equip them to share it. Eighty five percent of adult believers became Christians before the age of 23 years; the harvest is ripe.

As part of HOPE 2008, Christians of all ages and in over 1,500 locations around the UK, engaged with their community in loads of creative ways. Young people, from many different backgrounds led the way in working together, meeting practical and spiritual needs, and making their area a better place to live. For many of these, mission was seen as something that you went abroad to do, but they gained a fresh understanding that mission begins at home. Many came to know Jesus, and many more felt the love of God through such projects as schools work, fun days, street evangelism, community clean-ups, sports ministries and more.

The wonderful thing about young people is that they are not held back by denominational differences. When they become a Christian that's just what they are – a follower of Jesus.

### A dream of transformation

HOPE has been re-launched because we feel God has given the leadership team a dream to see the local churches working together even more, to see more lives changed and see transformation of whole communities. Young people are a vital part of this and, when they are given the chance and the freedom, they love to be right at the heart of the action! As chair of the Youth Agencies Network, we are using HOPE as a brand under which to work together more.

### An impact with the Good News

HOPE will build momentum over the next four years, highlighting important opportunities in the Christian calendar, and culminating in a full year of activity and evangelism in 2014. This year's focus is Easter. A *Hope for Easter resource book* provides creative mission ideas and includes a study guide designed for young people by Soul Action. Easter is a major opportunity to look outwards and share the life-changing story of Jesus and its relevance to our lives.

HOPE involves all ages, but with young people the key is to meet them where they are, be real and encourage them to reach out to their peers. Let us see the good news of Jesus celebrated, shared and making an impact.

**Roy Crowne** became HOPE Together Executive Director in March 2010. For 12 years he was National Director of Youth for Christ in Britain for [www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk)