



Keeping Evangelism Central

by Mikey Lynch¹

Introduction

0.1 Who am I?²

0.2 Why talking about this topic

- Snapshot of AFES Hobart.
 - Approximately 15 000 undergraduates and 1 700 postgraduates in Hobart.
 - Average attendance: 55 Christian Union, 60 FOCUS, 35 Subbies.³
 - Percentage evangelistic growth per year in our ministry is: 3.6%–5.4% in Christian Union (2–3 converts), 5%–8.3% in FOCUS (3–5 converts), 0% in Subbies (0 converts).

0.3 Goal for our Christian Unions

- Some expectations around the normal pattern of evangelism in Australia at the moment:
 - The **average Australian church** has an average attendance of 70 people and an average annual conversion growth of 0%–1.4% (0–1 converts per year).
 - In its third year, **the average Australian church plant** has an average attendance of 61 people and an annual conversion growth of 8.2% (5 converts).
 - From the 2014 AGM Affiliate reports, **the average AFES group** has an average attendance⁴ of 47 people and 23 people for FOCUS.
 - From surveying a sample of groups across Australia, it seems a healthy Christian Union has a growth rate is 3% per year and a great growth rate is 6+%.⁵
- Wouldn't it be great to pray and work for 5%–7% conversion growth every year?

0.4 Disclaimers

¹ For Student Committees Training Conference, Canberra December 2018 and Credo UTS leaders May 2019.

² You can find our ministries online at ufcutas.org, focustas.org and subbies.org.au, as well as on Facebook. You can follow me online at genevapush.com/xian_reflections, twitter.com/mikey_g_lynch and facebook.com/xianreflections. This year I also published my first book through Matthias Media: *The Good Life in the Last Days: Making Choices When the Time Is Short*.

³ A new FOCUS ministry to subcontinental Asian students.

⁴ Based on average attendance at public meeting or small groups (whichever is larger).

⁵ Based on average attendance at public meeting or small groups (whichever is larger).

0.5 Outline of this seminar

1. Evangelism Should Be Central

1.1 For all Christian life and ministry

- The Scriptures teach that the salvation of sinners through the preaching of the gospel and in answer to prayer is God's saving purpose in the world (e.g. Luke 15 and 24). It is one of the great ways that he glorifies himself and loves the world.

1.2 For AFES groups in particular

- We are local missionary societies. So an AFES group might be concerned about pastoral care, Christian maturity and nurture, but one of our peculiar reasons for existing is to evangelise university students.^{6 7}
- Former National Director of AFES, Andrew Reid, said this at our Staff Conference in 2006:

" I think that the danger is that this generation are so impoverished in their knowledge that we spend our time just making sure that they are Christian without pushing them toward evangelism and changing the world through mission. In Victoria, I think that this is seen in the changing nature of our mid-year conferences. I'm not sure that on the whole they are highly focussed in terms of evangelism and mission. I don't get the feeling that we are envisioning our students to change the world or turn it upside down through Gospel proclamation. Instead, we appear to have moved away from being a tightly focussed missionary task force. We are moving much more into the domain of being a church and doing the job that the local churches are not doing. I've been reflecting on this trend over the last week or so and I'm convinced that it is detrimental. It is not the direction that we should be travelling in. We are a missionary task force. We always have been. And we abandon this at our peril....

My own suspicion is that evangelism and mission are dropping off our radar in terms of priorities. The only reason for my thinking this is that I don't see our groups growing through evangelism or producing evangelists or appointing evangelists. To some extent, I think that this is my own fault. When I changed our method of staffworking in the mid 80s, I put the focus on appointing Bible teachers. If I had my time again, I would appoint Bible teachers AND evangelists....

I want to say that I think there is one more danger we face as an organisation looking into the future. The danger is that we become large and respectable. We reach middle age and put aside youthful enthusiasm and vigour. We become middle aged, with a middle aged spread. Respectable and safe. No longer concerned with changing the world."⁸

- Some of us are even convinced, wrongly in my view⁹, that AFES ministry is theologically-speaking

⁶ I would stretch this a little further and suggest that in practice our groups are primarily evangelising 18–24 year old university students and on-campus university students. While should and will also reach some 18–24 year olds who are studying online, and some mature age students who are studying on campus, it is largely beyond our scope to strive to reach a mature age student studying an online course part time!

⁷ Another key reason for our existence is an ability to focus deeply on recruiting and training for ministry and missionary work. If over time (and in proportion to its size and context) an AFES group is seeing neither ministry apprentices nor conversions, that's a cause for serious prayer and self-examination.

⁸ Andrew Reid, Learning from History, AFES Staff Conference, June 2006.

⁹ "The local church is not just any occasional gathering of Christians that involves prayer and Bible study. A church is a gathering that formally calls itself 'church'. Gathering around Christ's word is a necessary condition for an assembly to be a Christian church, but it is not a sufficient condition. To be a local church it needs to be 'formed', 'constituted', 'instituted', 'covenanted', 'planted' or 'particularized' — whatever your particular convictions about church

'church' and so must do everything that any church should be doing with equal measure.

- Jerry White, formal international director of Navigators writes in his book: *The Church & The Para-Church: An Uneasy Marriage*:

Para-local church organizations should clearly define their purposes and goals, and be willing to be evaluated. Organizations become ineffective as they compromise their vision. Para-local church societies need to know why they exist, and be able to clearly communicate their goals. They also need to demonstrate their effectiveness in some measurable way. Issues like administration, overhead, evangelistic results, utilization of staff time, staff accountability, and general financial responsibility all represent possible areas for evaluation.¹⁰

2. Seven Myths About Evangelism¹¹

2.1 Myth #1: Mature Christians just will evangelise¹²

2.2 Myth #2: Trained Christians just will evangelise

2.3 Myth #3: Christians who do cold contact will do personal evangelism

2.4 Myth #4: Public mission events fuel personal evangelism

2.5 Myth #5: Get your social media and branding right and people will become Christians

2.6 Myth #6: Get your cultural engagement right and people will become Christians

2.7 Myth #7: The best strategy is to get every Christian evangelising

3. Keeping Evangelism Central

government and preferences of terminology dictate." from *The Vine Movement: Building Trellises for the Global Vine* (work in progress) by Mikey Lynch.

¹⁰ Jerry White, *The Church & The Para-Church: An Uneasy Marriage*, (Portland Or: Multnomah Press, 1983), 120.

¹¹ Some of these myths come from Craig Dobbie *Evangelism Myths and Challenges* from <https://genevapush.com/resources/evangelism-myths-and-challenges/> (accessed 18th November 2018).

¹² I think John Dickson does a good job of showing the various ways the New Testament speaks about all Christians sharing in the work of evangelism in his book *Promoting The Gospel* (also published as *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*).

3.1 Create an environment of evangelistic concern and expectation

- Spiritual seriousness.
- Praying.
- Testimonies.
- Big preaching.
- Create a hostile environment.
- Create a welcoming environment.

3.2 Identify and work with the evangelists

- At least three types of evangelists:¹³
 - **Bringers:**
 - **Gatherers:**
 - **Persuaders:**
- Establish an evangelism team.

3.3 Mobilise all the others to help the evangelistic work

3.4 Create open Christian communities

3.5 Regular evangelistic courses and evangelistic Bible reading

3.6 The O Week funnel¹⁴

- Our components are all pretty familiar:
 - Mass fliering at all orientation lectures.
 - Attractive Societies Day Stall.
 - Paid Facebook advertising (as well as lots of organic Facebook activity).
 - Survey stalls Monday to Thursday of Week 1.

¹³ These first two terms I stole from the *Redeemer Church Planting Manual*.

¹⁴ For more information, I've blogged about our O Week Mission process here:

https://genevapush.com/blogs/xian_reflections/repost-utas-o-week-mission-2016-part-1-overview-of-process-june-2016/ and in a reflection 1 year later here: https://genevapush.com/blogs/xian_reflections/o-week-mission-2017-debrief/ (accessed 18th November 2018).

- Free pizza parties each evening of Week 1.¹⁵
- We have good quality free.
- Personal follow up.
- We start evangelistic courses in Weeks 2 and 3.
- On our campus of ~15 000 students with an average attendance in our group of 55:
 - ~1000 surveys completed.
 - 400 say they are open to finding out more.
 - 70 come to free pizza parties.
 - 70 actually end up meeting us for coffee and/or coming to our events.
 - 10 attend our evangelistic courses.
 - 2 become Christians.
 - On top of this, many more Christians find out about and join our group too.

Appendix: Organisational disciplines and values

5.1 Measure

- How can you consistently measure key statistics and results?
- What should you measure? What causal relationships do you need to know about?
- The more consistent your measurements are each year over many years, the more you can learn.
- Don't try to measure so much stuff you spend all your time measuring! Even if the measurements aren't perfect they can still be useful.

5.2 Assess

- Give good time to careful reflection and analysis of how things are going. Compare to previous years, while realising that a 5 year trend is more reliable than the jumps from one year to the next.
- Be realistic about things, but don't let realism lead to excuse-making and settling for the status quo. Be willing to face brutal reality and make major changes if needed.
- Invite others, including those outside your ministry, to help you in this process.

5.3 Quality control and procedure

- Be diligent in doing things in the most loving, persuasive, accessible and efficient way possible.
- Shared Drive of key documents that can be used and added to each year, as well as by giving someone the job of overseeing the whole area of evangelism.

¹⁵ Some campuses also do a hangout space during the day that they invite new contacts to, with food, drink and the opportunity to build connection with Christians.