



The question of *our identity as a prophetic community of God's people* was what we considered as we began the New Year and decade of 2010.

The following two articles summarise a biblical perspective of what it is to be a church community and how that community can be intentionally prophetic.

## 1. Church is people in community

If asked what church is or what's it all really about, how would you answer? I expect many might be tempted to share a perspective based on their personal experience (good or bad). But as we look through the lens of Scripture, we find God's perspective and see that *church essentially is about people*. It's about the *persons* of the Trinity – God our heavenly Father; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is head of the church; and the Holy Spirit who lives within us - and the *people* who make up the Body of Christ. It also includes the *people* God wants us to draw into His family in the future. *Church is all about people* and God's restorative love that connects them relationally with Him and each other.

### Called out into community

Each of us has experienced that gracious intervention when *God called us out* of our former ways and *brought us in* to His family – the community of His people. Community can be defined generally as a group of individuals committed to a common vision who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other; whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure; and who have developed some significant commitment to embrace one another's conditions as their own, for the sake of a common vision.

### The growing process of practiced Christian community

All who follow Christ experience a life journey of maturing transformation. *It's a growing process* of embracing the better ways of God as we relinquish the former unfruitful ways we learned from the world. The evidence of this is most effectively seen in community. I believe *God has a season of His grace for us*, where He would lead us into a deeper, more mature sense of community, where loving conduct truly does give evidence of His transforming work within. What that might look like is seen in the church as portrayed in the Book of Acts. Acts, by the way, comes from the Greek word *praxis* from which we get 'practice.' It referred to *'the practice of Christianity'* or, more accurately: *'The*

*practice or actions of God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in and through Christians.'* Acts 2:42-47 describes what the practical practice of the early church's growing faith looked like.

### **The practical practice of the founding church**

The first Spirit-filled community of God's people were a community with a common sense of purpose. Four significant aspects of the *purposeful practice* of their new-found faith in Christ are apparent.

*They were hungry to learn the ways of God, and therefore devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* - which is what we now know as the New Testament. A true Bible-believing, Spirit-filled church both studies *and submits to* the authority of Scripture.

*They were a loving church which devoted themselves to fellowship.*

These followers of Christ were drawn together in a community that reflected the love and commitment of God's family Jesus had said: *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."*

*They were a worshipping church which devoted themselves to "... the breaking of bread and to prayer."* It seems they had a healthy balance of both formal and informal gatherings; of public and private expressions of worship; and of joy [as a 'fruit of the Spirit'] and awe [obedience to God's expressed will out of a reverent fear for Him]. *Prayer*, both private & public kept them vitally connected to their God.

*They were an inclusive, evangelistic church.* Acts tells of their spontaneous evangelism as the Spirit empowered them and sent them out to tell others about Jesus, and *"the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved."* God adds, not us! They were *an inclusive community*. New converts should join a Christian community, and a Christian community should welcome and embrace them. When we get together, are we inclusive or cliquey?

Are these four aspects of the *purposeful practice* of our faith in Christ apparent in our community?

## 2. The local church is a prophetic community *with purpose*

*“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). God has in mind specific good works for us to do - both individually and together as a church. He reveals His intentions prophetically to and through His Church (through the Bible or via the prophetic gifts). We understand Him to have said that He has an inheritance for us as a church, an assignment with our name on it – it's ours by His authority, but like Caleb, we have to fight for it. God wants us to be a **prophetic community**, a people committed to taking hold of what He has in mind for us so His Kingdom might come and His will be done.*

### **What does it mean to be ‘prophetic’?**

It is the ability to see, prepare for and become the future. Terry Virgo puts it this way: *‘a prophetic person is one who is totally alive to world issues and yet totally sold out to God's perspective.’* Life is lived with a Biblical world view, seen from God's perspective and anchored in the reality of truth.

**The prophetic church is to be a sign** of what God's done and of the season to come. The Christians of the Book of Acts were a sign of things to come. Paul's dramatically changed lifestyle as a follower of the Way was a prophetic statement of the church age - he forsook his past religious prejudices and traditions to build church according to the revelation of God's way. *Do our transformed lives* similarly point to the transforming grace of God in us?

**What a prophetic church does** Before you mentally tick off *‘we do that’* – consider *‘do we really?’*

**A prophetic church praises** – declaring what God has done thankfully; declaring in faith what He will do; and celebrating Who and what He is. We do that in our meetings, in our conversations and as we live in all situations. Do our lives celebrate God? Is our conversation one of gratitude to God?

**A prophetic church prays prophetically** – *Prophetic prayer is declarative*, aligning ourselves with God's will and truth. *Prophetic prayer is real* – not phony and for show. What does our prayer-life look like?

**A prophetic church progresses** – being *‘transformed into Christ's likeness in increasing measure by the renewing of our minds ... no longer conforming to the pattern of this world.’* We're discovering God's better way. *Are we living it - growing* relationally with God and each other; and in faith and deed - or are we stagnating, satisfied with the status quo?

**A prophetic church participates** – blending the diverse gifts and talents we have together as a team. Paul described the practice of the early

church as a “*partnership in the gospel.*” The new ‘Way’ of the sect, as Christianity was seen by outsiders, involved a whole priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5). All the offices in the church were based on gift and function. Every believer was considered to have some kind of contributing ministry. Are we actively involved? How can I contribute? What’s in my hand – what’s God given me to offer?

**A prophetic church is intentionally planted as a *presence*** – showing evidence of the abiding presence of God within it. As Christians our function as ‘*salt*’ is to give flavour to the earth. God enjoys this flavour. Unappetizing food becomes tasty and acceptable when flavoured with ‘*salt*’. Incredibly, our presence makes the earth acceptable to God and commends the earth to His grace and mercy rather than His wrath and judgment. Furthermore, our presence as upholders of truth and godliness holds in check the forces of corruption and lawlessness until God’s appointed time. Finally, our presence on the “*banks of the river of life flowing from God’s throne*” brings the potential for God’s healing grace to all peoples (Rev.22:1,2). Is our presence making a difference in our community, our work environments, and in our city?

**A prophetic church *proclaims the truth*** – God is Truth. As we embrace His perspective of reality, our conversations and lifestyle will begin to reflect a different worldview - a biblical-world-view. “Submission to Christ without submission to the Scriptures is submission to a self-made Christ, not submission to Christ”. Do our actions and behaviour proclaim God’s truth?

**A prophetic church is *productive*** – Jesus said: “*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.*” Ezekiel prophesied: “*Fishermen will stand along the shore ... there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds*”. Are we reproducing fully-devoted followers of Christ and seeing new people coming to faith in Christ?

**A prophetic church is *particular*** – It has a particular flavour suited to the purpose for which God planted it. Consider: ‘*What is church? What’s it about and what’s so important about it?*’ I believe it’s people! The emerging particular of Constantiaberg Church has to do with godly relationships - real, open, honest, and true - that reflect Christ. “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*” The purpose of our love for one another is to reflect the God of love whom we serve to a lost and dying world. Are interpersonal relationships a priority in our lives?

**By God’s grace we can be what God intends us to be – *His prophetic community***, called out to reflect the reality of His presence, His nature and His character – so that more people might be restored to a knowledge of Him. “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness*” (2 Peter 1:3). Acts describes the kind of community I can willingly commit to being part of! How about you?

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