

LIFE AND WORSHIP:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE
ACTIVITIES OF THE PERTH ASIAN CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY

By

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

In the subject

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

At the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NOVEMBER 2009

Declaration

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I declare that "LIFE AND WORSHIP: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PERTH ASIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY" is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Gail Smit

November 2009

KEY TERMS

New Life City Church, Asian Christian Church, wall-less church, House Churches, Post-Christian, Western church, Paul Hattaway, Brother Yun, The Great Commission, church growth, founder members, first-generation Christians, Christian education, worship, conversion growth, Joshua-Life, Twelve Stones.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is in partial fulfilment of my calling by God to be a watchman over His house, an intercessor for the lost and those suffering in His service. This study is in His service for His glory to be revealed to all the nations.

Thank you to my promoter, Prof Jacques Theron, for his expertise and encouragement. Thank you for being patient with my computer illiteracy.

To my dear, wonderful husband, Hennie Smit, who has stood by me throughout this study, encouraging me in my work and supporting me every step of the way. Thank you that you live Jesus in all facets of your life. Thank you to our daughters, Bronwyn and Genevieve who have been patient with me even while they too are full time students. Thank you to my parents, Bob and Sue Trollip for their constant prayers.

Thank you Pastor Yat Wan. You opened the church to me and invited everyone to participate in the study. Thank you to all those members in the NLCC who participated in the interviews and made me feel at home. Thank you NLCC for your prayers and for showing me how a wall-less church operates.

I dedicate this study to the martyrs who have given their lives when they took up the call to help complete the Great Commission and the living martyrs who still suffer for their efforts.

May God bless you all.

ABSTRACT

The focus of this practical theological study is the analysis of the life and worship of the Perth Asian Christian Community in the New Life City Church, where we note fast maturation of Christians with a desire to complete the Great Commission. As participant observer using the qualitative method, I was able to identify how the NLCC is wall-less by interviewing different groups within the church and two Western sample groups.

To accomplish this, Chapter two analyses the Western and Asian churches' understanding of the concepts 'church' and 'church growth'. The evaluations showed a difference in understanding. This prompted an inquiry in chapter three into their understanding of the Great Commission from the Western and Asian viewpoint against the Biblical understanding thereof. The intention of NLCC groups interviewed in Chapters four to eight was to detect what they perceived as helping them mature as Christians, considering many are first-generation Christians. The groups interviewed included founder members, first-generation Christians, youth group leaders, returned NLCC missionaries and the pastor. By Chapter nine it was established that the Asian Christian understood worship in a broader context. Chapter ten summarises the interpreted data of the groups interviewed and identifies stimulants for maturation of individual Christians in a post-Christian environment. The broader understanding of worship is discussed. These guidelines form the building blocks for a practical theological theory of church growth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The invasion of the Church by the world is a menace to the extension of Christ's Kingdom. In all ages conformity to the world by Christians has resulted in lack of spiritual life and a consequent lack of spiritual vision and enterprise. A secularized or self-centred Church can never evangelize the world.¹

1.1 Problem stated

1.1.1 General overview of the Western Church

The preceding quotation by John R. Mott highlights the problems the church is facing to an even greater degree in the present age than in the past. The church appears to be irrelevant in the Western world unless it adopts some of the worldliness. George Barna argues that irregular church attendance is "...a reflection of people's increased spiritual options, busy schedules, diminished sense of obligation and general boredom with the predictability of the Sunday morning event."² Barna further describes the movements of mosaics. The church is experiencing lack of growth numerically and spiritually within the individual as it strives to become

¹ John R. Mott. *More Great Quotes* found at <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (Accessed 6 December 2008).

² George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (USA: California, Regal Books, 2001), 236
Mosaics – the generation born between the years 1985-2004. According to Barna, Mosaics find the concept of absolute truth foreign and tend to believe in a combination of pantheism, nihilism and democratic capitalism. Barna feels they are the first true postmodern generation.

relevant in society. The battle to become relevant is costing the church in terms of obedience to Jesus' order to complete the Great Commission.

Frost and Hirsch further highlight the so-called irrelevance of the Christian message in the following statement: "As missionaries, we feel in our very bones a great sense of impatience with the increasing irrelevance of the church within Western culture."³

George Otis mentions that, "...the West is almost exclusively concerned with how to conquer and manipulate the material world."⁴ This is in contrast with the fact that the rest of the world is concerned with how to cope with the human and spirit worlds.

Otis is concerned about the spiritual belief systems of Islam, Hinduism and even materialism that he thinks rival the Christian belief system. Otis further illustrates the rival belief systems' strategy by mentioning that the Hindu leadership in India hoped to see at least 100 000 people reconvert to Hinduism by 1990.⁵ Otis continues, telling the reader that the New Age movement continues to grow. New Age is an offshoot of Hinduism.⁶ Kelly Burke mentions that there are now more Buddhists in Australia than Baptists.⁷ This information may come as a surprise to most Christian Australians.

While we realise that the Eastern religions have made an impact in the West, consumerism appears to be an enemy too. Otis says that "Rather than embracing happiness as the by-product of obedience to God, the achievement of his own

³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (USA: Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2004), xi

⁴ George Otis Jr, *The Last of the Giants* (Michigan: Grant Rapids, Baker Book House, 1991), 39

⁵ Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 53

⁶ Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 54

⁷ Kelly Burke is a Religious Affairs writer. For further information see <http://www.smh.com.au> (Accessed 7 May 2009).

happiness becomes the highest moral purpose.”⁸ Otis aptly states, “The Decade of Transition has seen the sermon of comfort-through-consumption spread around the world.”⁹

Otis has described some Western churches with the following thought: “...financial or numerical success is confused with spiritual anointing, and ‘servant’ ministers are willing to sell their services for ‘ten shekels and a shirt’.” Churches are increasingly evaluated for the efficiency of their parking procedures, and psalmists and worship leaders are being replaced on the platform by Jesus Christ’s superstars.”¹⁰

According to Otis, an article in *World Evangelism Magazine* of 1988 says that Islam hopes to win between 50 000 and 75 000 Americans to Islam.¹¹ Presently, in hindsight, we can witness the force Islam is using to convert those in their path. For instance Otis mentions that in West Germany there has been an increase of Muslims since 1985 with about two million claiming to worship in over 900 mosques.

Another disturbing trend is the fact that Holland has Europe’s first Muslim television company.¹² Otis has not overlooked Britain and Northern Ireland where up to 100 000 members are lost to Christian churches per year. He also mentions that the Muslim population had increased by 50 000 in the year 1987-88.¹³

The Western church’s struggle to gain numbers in an increasingly post-Christian society is evident in a country such as Australia. Australia is a typical post-Christian society where 82% of persons over 65 years of age identified themselves as Christian

⁸ Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 56

⁹ George Otis Jr, *The Last of the Giants* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1991), 57

¹⁰ Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 58

¹¹ Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 62

¹² Otis, *The Last of the Giants*, 75

¹³ Ibid

compared to 60% in the 18-25 year category.¹⁴ It appears as if a whole generation of people have not known church as a normal part of their upbringing.

This in turn has led to an additional problem: the fact that many young people today have no basic knowledge of Christianity and can therefore be considered first-generation Christians when they start attending church. This being the case, how does the Western church manage new so-called first-generation Christians? The Western church has no frame of reference to work on in this instance because in the West most people are considered to have some basic Biblical knowledge. In the post-Christian era, the problem of the basic lack of knowledge of the Bible cannot merely be followed by a one-step salvation. Jesus left us with the order in the Great Commission to make disciples. Barna found in his study that only one in six church attendants participate in discipleship, the majority of these being women. Sadly, Barna has also found that young twenty-something adults are only half as likely to get involved in discipleship.¹⁵

Church growth is often studied within the context of the Great Commission. Guder (as cited in Anderson) expresses the missional calling of the church as follows, “The calling of the church to be missional – to be a sent community – leads the church to step beyond the given cultural forms that carry dubious assumptions about what the church is, what its public role should be, and what its voice sounds like.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics census of 2001. For further information <http://www.abs.gov.au/stats> (Accessed 10 March 2008).

¹⁵ George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (USA: California, Regal Books, 2001), 242

¹⁶ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Illinois, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 100

The question arises as to whether the church will cope with the influx of numbers when God answers prayer for *revival*.¹⁷ A further question may also be asked: will the church be able to mature these new-comers so that they too can reach out to others? By this I mean, will the church be able to disciple the newcomers and send them out to complete the Great Commission. Anderson says, “Those who are gathered around the meal of Christ at the altar must arise with the mission of Christ burning in their hearts. We sup with Christ in order to run with him. The church needs to unleash its members and become a sending church rather than a gathering one.”¹⁸

The Western church has been challenged in its usual approach to being church, doing church and understanding church and church growth. The multi-faceted challenge facing the Western church means that it may need to start looking at, *inter alia*, conversion growth rather than transfer growth. Conversion growth should be related to discipleship as mentioned by Jesus in His order to the church to complete the Great Commission. However, the concept of *salvation* and the process of *conversion* are two very different concepts that need to be analysed further during the course of this research. Guder, (as cited in Anderson), states that the focus on individual salvation as the main focus on mission, has led to what he calls *reductionism*. (See footnote).¹⁹ Anderson continues further, saying “The nature of

¹⁷ Revival- is defined as a renewal in the way church is experienced and the way faith is experienced by the individual. Mary Warburton Booth defined revival as “How we prayed for a Revival.... what we asked for was that it should be such that would cleanse and revive His children and set them on fire to win others.” From More Great Quotes, <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (Accessed 3 November 2007).

¹⁸ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent theology for Emerging churches* (Illinois: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 198

¹⁹ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 179

the church is determined in its existence as the mission of God to the world.”²⁰ This is, after all, one of the primary functions of the church. The Western church appears to be focussed on itself instead of having a broader vision of reaching outside the four walls of the church. Anderson argues that mission rather than ministry will expand the kingdom of God and breathe new life into the church.²¹

Our attention is brought to the thoughts of *Brother Yun*²² who says that church disputes have kept our eyes off the Great Commission and time has been wasted on the daily household tasks of the church. Minor disagreements have become larger issues and so the church has not become the dynamic, outward-reaching army of God, pursuing the lost and bringing them with love into knowledge of the Kingdom of God. The result of disputes within the Western church accounts for the large number of different denominations.²³

1.1.2 The Asian Church – an opposite scenario?

The above words of Brother Yun lead us to have a closer look at the Chinese church that has been growing exponentially for several years. What are they doing correctly/ more effectively that the Western church is missing out on?

According to Lambert in 1976 there were no known open churches in China compared to 50 000 registered Protestant churches by 2006. These Protestants account for 17-20 million people. This figure swells to at least 60 million when the

“Reductionism is our understanding of the gospel and of salvation... The gospel has been reduced to a message focused on the individual’s salvation: the fundamental evangelistic question is assumed to be “Are you saved?”

²⁰ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Illinois: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 186

²¹ Ibid

²² Brother Yun suffered for his faith in China. He escaped to Germany and now travels the world spreading the news of the revival in the Chinese Church.

²³ Brother Yun, *Living Water*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 141

house church numbers are added. According to Lambert these numbers are close to those of the Christian numbers in the United States.²⁴

Brother Yun illustrates the growth of the Chinese church further in this statement.

In China the church has seen 100 000 000 people transformed by the power and love of Jesus Christ. And it is only just the start. In many ways it has been just like the book of Acts, and God has been with us as we have put aside our petty squabbles and gone forth proclaiming the truth. My friend, do not sit around waiting to become perfect before you feel qualified to serve God. That day will never come in your lifetime! Go forth and do what Jesus commanded all of His followers to do, and the Lord will change your life as you obey Him.²⁵

Aikman explains that since 1949 missionaries to China have noticed that groups in China have had the desire to take the Gospel in a westerly direction.²⁶ A British missionary reported the following as cited in Aikman, "... the thing that has impressed me most...has been strange, unaccountable urge of a number of different Chinese groups, quite unconnected with each other, who have left their homes in east China and gone forth, leaving practically everything behind them, to the west."²⁷ Further we notice in Aikman that the desire to take the Gospel westward back to Jerusalem was rekindled in the mid 1990's. The Chinese have the desire to take the Gospel along the Silk Road, back to Jerusalem.²⁸ Lambert adds to this statement when he says that the rural house church network of mostly semi-literate

²⁴ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 18-19

²⁵ Brother Yun, *Living Waters*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 144

²⁶ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Monarch Books, 2003), 199

²⁷ *Ibid*, 199

²⁸ *Ibid*, 201

believers sent out teams into different areas of China. These networks became national and can claim several million followers.²⁹

The challenge of this study will be to observe the concepts that feed growth within the Chinese church and adopt them within the Western setting. We could, for instance, learn from Christians who have been in China and compare their experiences to those in the Western world. Brother Yun illustrates this in the following quotation.

Of course, not all Western churches are asleep! Of all the strong churches I have visited in the West, I've noticed one thing they all have in common: a strong and sacrificial commitment to missions among unreached nations. I'm talking about a heart to establish God's kingdom in the most gospel-starved and spiritually dark areas of the world, where nobody has ever heard the name of Jesus. When you start putting your time, prayers and finances there, you will soon experience God's blessing on the work of your hands. If your vision for the Lord has been too small, then ask Him to share HIS vision with you.³⁰

We realise from the above statements that the Western church is facing a multi-faceted problem encompassing their understanding of church and church growth as well as the role the church needs to play in completing the Great Commission. Could it be that the Western church members lack the confidence in general, to reach outside the church to the lost people whereas, the Chinese church appears to love spreading the Gospel?

²⁹ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 65

³⁰ Brother Yun, *Living Waters*, Ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 181

1.2 Rationale of research

I will explain in four points the background of the key questions of the research and then give reasons for developing a new practical theological approach to growing a church in the post-Christian areas.

1.2.1 Background

The first problem is to grow a church in Australia in such a way that it is relevant in the Australian context without losing sight of the Biblical standards set out by Jesus. Since coming to live in Australia, I have found a vast difference in the attitude of the people to Christianity compared to that in my birth country of South Africa.

Australians consider it their constitutional right not to be confronted by Christians and the Gospel. How can the church become outward reaching in the area it finds itself without being confrontational? Australians do not go to church just because it is Sunday.

The previous generation's children are now searching for so-called spiritual input, often in the wrong places from a Christian viewpoint. I think specifically of the lucrative New Age market in Australia. An example of the Australian attitude to religion is the fact that Kelly Burke commented that the Australian Bureau of Statistics had an undisclosed number of people list themselves as Star Wars Jedi worshippers in spite of pre-census warnings of prosecution.³¹ In addition, the Australian results of the census in 2001 show an increase of 34.6% since 1996 of

³¹ Kelly Burke, Religious Affairs writer. <http://www.smh.com.au> (Accessed 10 March 2009).

people classifying themselves as 'other religion' rather than Christian or the better-known Eastern religions.³²

People are searching for God, but they do not know where to find Him. The churches have found Him, but many do not know how to reach the un-churched and bring them into the house of God. It is a classic example of the *house of God* should go to the people; the people are not willingly or knowingly going to come to the house of God.³³ The question raised is whether the church needs to become wall-less in its outreach to the lost sheep. Snyder states: "The church must be freed to participate fully in the economy of God."³⁴ Snyder suggests that the church is to be set free for the Kingdom of God where it no longer just concentrates on church work, but on the whole Kingdom of God.

It is essential at this point to define the term, 'wall-less church' in order that the reader understands the correct interpretation thereof within the context of this thesis.

A wall-less church is a church characterized by passionate, Great Commission Christians who reach outside of their church and their comfort zones to bring the Gospel to others, wherever they may 'be at' as regards their spiritual or physical position. The wall-less church will reach out to the recipient/ pre-Christian regardless of where the recipient intends to worship after conversion. The wall-less church does not try to attract members in order to become a sizeable church, but rather,

³² Australian Bureau of Statistics found at <http://www.abs.gov.au.stats> (Accessed 10 March 2009).

³³ House of God – I use this term to describe anyone who is a Christian and either attends organised church or house churches and takes the Gospel seriously by upholding Godly principles.

³⁴ Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1982), 11

the church reaches out in order to convert a lost world. The wall-less church does not associate God's presence with a church building. The wall-less church Christians are encouraged in their faith- walk through Christian education, nurturing in smaller groups (especially learning confident testimony sharing), sustained, strategic prayer, participation in the faith vision of the church and incorporating worship into every facet of their daily lives. They are characterized by holiness living in perpetual worship where pre-Christians are brought to conversion and not only salvation. In other words, the congregation does the preaching by bringing the indwelling Christ to others in daily life.

McGavran's thoughts on the wall-less church are similar. McGavran's comment on the wall-less church is as follows; "The time has come to free world evangelization and church multiplication from the chains which attach it to the erection of commodious buildings. Let the church be seen as a company of the redeemed."³⁵ⁱ

For further information read The McGavran Mega-Church Growth Model.³⁶

1.2.2 A solution?

The first problem we need to look at is the general lack of growth of most churches in Australia and the fact that most churches make no impact in their community. How can a church become wall-less in the sense of reaching into the community but remain steadfast in Godly principles? This thesis will try to develop some guidelines, which cover the study of a wall-less church in Perth, Australia. In this thesis I will look

³⁵ Books.google.com.au/books? ISBN=093272700x Forward by McGavran on Thomas S. Goslin II's book; *The Church without Walls*. (no date)

³⁶ <http://www.thorncrownjournal.com/turners/churchgrowth.html>

at the different groups within the church, such as the first-generation Christians and the role of the youth to determine how this church functions. What makes this church more interesting is the fact that it is an Asian Christian church. As has been mentioned earlier, the Chinese church is the fastest growing church in the world. We can learn from them.

The second problem relates closely to the first. How can the church grow the individuals within its fellowship so that they too can go out and spread the Gospel? It is obvious to most pastors that a church may be large in number but poor in maturity of the individuals that make up this number. We need to look at how to mature individuals to the stage that they too will go out and witness the Gospel to the lost. In answering this problem I will look at the difference between salvation and the *sinner's prayer* of the Western church compared to the concept of conversion as referred to by the Chinese house churches and the particular Asian church in Perth that forms the basis for this thesis.³⁷ We know that the concept of *conversion* is related to discipleship in the context of the Chinese church.³⁸

Broadly speaking conversion is not one event but is a sequence of events:

confession, repentance, conversion, baptism, change of life and discipleship

³⁷ Sinner's Prayer is a concept freely used in most of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches today where a person who wants to become a Christian is invited to repeat a prayer with the leader. The prayer usually starts with repentance and ends with "asking Jesus into their heart". By asking Jesus into their heart, we mean that simplistically speaking, Jesus is invited by the new Christian to come and dwell in him and to become part of his life. This is also commonly known as "making a decision for Jesus". However, many of these so-called sinner's prayers do not contain the element of repentance, such as those proposed by Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. This I do believe is an issue in the post-Christian church - lack of repentance.

³⁸ Conversion – usually describes the process in which a person turns from their old way of life and starts to implement Christian principles in daily life in order to live a Godly life based on Biblical principles. This means, the process of turning from sin to God who is our only hope of grace and salvation.

Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, speaks of restoring relationships and reconciliation, but repentance is never mentioned. Biblically speaking, when we confess our sins and repent, then we are reconciled to God. Reconciliation does not come without repentance first. Warren suggests reconciliation with those with whom we have broken relationships. However, to his credit he does suggest we approach God first to so seek His guidance.³⁹ Gilley commented that Warren does not mention repentance.⁴⁰ Gilley once again draws our attention to Warren omitting to mention sin, repentance and the cross.⁴¹

We need to investigate this further during this thesis to study the impact this has on growth of individuals within the church and the growth in numbers of the church. The Asian church in Perth has a reputation for maturing individuals quickly to the stage where they are sent on outreach or mission. The researcher gives specific attention to this aspect during this study in order to provide a solution to the problem of maturity in the Western church in the post-Christian areas.

The third problem investigated in this thesis is the fact that the Great Commission does not appear to be an important part of Western church teaching, although it forms the very foundation of the Chinese church. Jesus left us with the order to complete the Great Commission. Why has this not yet been accomplished by the Western church that has known about the Good News for many years.

Anderson says the following about mission.

³⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (USA: New York, Zondervan, 2002), 152-159

⁴⁰ Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (US: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 106

⁴¹ Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church Stayed Home* (US: New York, Evangelical Press, 2006), 90

Ministry expends Spirit in programs and body building; mission breathes in Spirit and promotes body movement. Ministry tends to become centripetal , drawing energy toward the center; mission tends to be centrifugal , impelling energy outward. Pentecost is the manifestation of incarnational mission, not merely an infusion of spiritual enthusiasm. For the church to be both incarnational and Pentecostal in its theology and praxis, it must recover the dynamic relation between its nature and mission. ⁴²

Does the Great Commission form the foundational teaching of the Asian church in Perth that has been chosen for this study?

The fourth problem investigated in this thesis is the fact that the Western church needs to cope with un-churched, often first-generation Christians. I say this, because as explained earlier, many Australians have never been exposed to the Gospel because it seems to be a post-Christian area. Without exposure to the Gospel in the past, we can assume that they need to be managed as first-generation Christians when they do eventually join a church. How will the Western church best cope with first-generation Christians in its membership who have had no previous exposure to the Gospel? How can the church grow these individuals and care for them in the context of a church that invariably preaches with the assumption that everyone should have heard the Gospel at some stage. I would like, if possible, to deduce from the report guidelines what needs to be done in order to attempt to put

⁴² Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Illinois: Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 186

practical theological suggestions to the Western church on how to care for first-generation Christians in a Western church climate.

The four problems identified are closely related to one another. In studying the one we will get answers to the others as this thesis unfolds.

1.3 *Aim of the research*

The aim of the research is to answer the four questions above that the Western church in the post-Christian areas finds the most challenging. In studying an Asian church in Perth that is wall-less, dynamic and out-reaching, this thesis aims to put suggestions in place that the Western church could take to heart so that it may become more effective in spreading the Gospel and growing the church and the individuals within the church, even in a post-Christian climate. The aim is not to mobilise the church for evangelism overseas primarily. The aim is essentially to mobilise the church to survive the times it lives in at present and to make inroads into the post-Christian society in which it finds itself. It is assumed that if the church follows the guidelines that are derived from the example of the Asian church it could develop in a new way.

1.4 *Thesis defined*

Most Western Christians do not spread the Word outside of the church. They consider this activity to be the responsibility of trained ministers or evangelists. Christians and non-Christians alike realise that there is a lack of growth within the Western church. People in the Western world realise that the church appears to have very little impact on Western society. Jesus left us with the order to go and

make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18). It appears, in general, as if the Great Commission is not taken seriously in the Western church. How can a church become dynamic, growing and outward-looking? How can we inspire passionate, Great Commission Christians to get moving outside the walls of the church and spread the Good News?

The thesis explores how conversion growth is different to one-step salvation and how discipleship makes a difference to individual maturity and outreach of church members. An important part of this thesis is to detect the different understandings of church and church growth between the Western church and that of the Asian church. Further, this study seeks to determine how the different understanding of these concepts influences the church's view of being wall-less and relevant in the market place.

To accomplish this task we need to attempt to find out what has gone wrong with the church. Where is the Western church failing in getting new converts? Why does the Western church tend to contain its assets within the local church? Why do Western Christians, in general, feel that career-Christians are responsible for bringing new people into the church? What does the West understand by the body of Christ and the church? What approaches can be learnt from the Asian church, where churches are growing because of conversions and not merely church transfers?

To simplify the study, I have chosen to study the New Life City Church in Perth. In this way, I, as the participant observer, am able to study the dynamics of the church more easily than a church in Asia that may not be open to study because of

persecution of Christians. It is important to study this particular church in a Western setting, so that we can discern what principles the Asian church uses that may work in a Western setting.

This thesis can only attempt to answer the questions after considering the Western church in general and comparing it to the Asian church and then researching the New Life City Church as an Asian church within a Western setting. In this way I aim to detect aspects of the Asian Christians' understanding of church and mission and consider how we can apply them to the Western church so that it too can become a wall-less, dynamic church – even in a post-Christian setting.

1.5 Background for selecting *The New Life City Church*

I have chosen to study an Asian Christian church that appears to have the dynamics of Christian churches in Asia. By dynamics I mean that the church has a missionary heart. The church I have chosen to study is known as the New Life City Church in Perth, Australia. The New Life City Church is unique in that it is an Asian Christian church in a Western setting. In spite of its Western setting, it appears to be wall-less because its members are dynamic and outward reaching. This type of church is uncommon within a so-called post-Christian setting. This is why the New Life City Church (from now on referred to as NLCC) has been chosen as a point of study of a growing church, in a Western setting where growth by conversion occurs quite commonly. The NLCC appears to have a *kingdom vision* in that it takes the Great Commission seriously.⁴³ First-generation Christians and new converts mature

⁴³ Kingdom Vision – by this term I mean that the church looks beyond its usual circle of influence to see the whole of society as a possible place for outreach and mission. When this occurs, God's name is glorified on a larger scale.

quickly to the outreach stage. It appears that all the members of the church have a chance to go on mission at some stage if they are willing to do so. I have also specifically chosen to study the NLCC because it is not a large church, but rather one that appears to convert and send out people to spread the Gospel elsewhere. Added to this, the NLCC has never been studied academically before.

1.6 Methodology of the research

1.6.1 What is practical theology?

Theologians have warred over the definition of practical theology for many years. Catholic Church circles prefer to call it pastoral theology whereas the Protestant circles prefer to use the term practical theology to refer to the pastoral subjects. Edinburgh University introduced practical theology as a subject as early as 1924 according to Erwin Fahlbusch.⁴⁴

Seward Hiltner (as cited in Fahlbusch) describes practical theology to be an 'operation centred' theology as opposed to the 'logic centred' subjects in the rest of the theological disciplines. He argues that practical theology could give insight into the other theological disciplines.⁴⁵ In other words, practical theology stands distinct from them but also not really. Seward Hiltner defines practical theology as, "that branch or field of theological knowledge and inquiry that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these

⁴⁴ Erwin Fahlbusch, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and David B. Barrett, *Encyclopaedia of Christianity* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 318

⁴⁵ Erwin Fahlbusch et al, 318

observations."⁴⁶ In other words, even as early as 1958 Hiltner saw practical theology as critical and analytical. We can take this a step further and say that personal experiences of theologians in the field, will shape or determine academic theology because often the theologian at grass roots level will perceive problems in a certain situation that an academic may not necessarily be aware exists or be aware of the extent to which it may exist.

According to Fahlbusch, James Whyte of Scotland also defined practical theology as a theology of practice. He also added, however, that Paul Ballard argued that there is tension between theoretical research which takes place and the situation that needs to be reflected on by the theologian.⁴⁷

However practical theology developed from being a subject centred on the function of the clergy and the church to a subject that takes the world in relation to God into consideration. The progress of practical theology from being clergy- and church-centred to becoming a subject that considers the situation in which mankind finds itself, has proved to be the best approach for this particular thesis, in the sense that what is perceived in the post-Christian world in relation to God is studied in this particular research project and can best be defined by practical theology.

This means that practical theology does not need to depend on other subjects to carry out research. Practical theology is unique in that it can research the present world from a theological perspective. However, practical theology does not ignore the other disciplines, but works closely with them in an interdisciplinary sense. This

⁴⁶ Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 20

⁴⁷ Erwin Fahlbusch, translated Geoffrey W. Bromiley and David B. Barrett, *Encyclopaedia of Christianity* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 318

means that practical theology is not an isolated subject, but a unique subject that has earned its right to be an academic subject. Christians find themselves in the world; this fact we cannot ignore, but we can analyse the different situations in the light of the Gospel, thus allowing critical analysis and critical practice to take place.

Heitink has a similar view when he describes practical theology as follows:

Practical theology should be understood as an empirically descriptive and critically constructive theory of religious practice. The empirical and descriptive dimension, which is pursued in close co-operation with other disciplines in the field of cultural studies, prevents practical theology from wishful and speculative thinking and contributes to empirical theory building.⁴⁸

In other words, practical theology becomes a theology of transformation. The transformation view sits well with this thesis in that the research gleaned from investigations can be used to change present conditions. In other words, practical theology is not a static subject, but a dynamic one that makes the researcher question certain faith challenges in the real world and strives to answer that question by taking the practical situation into account while producing a theory that could be implemented. This in itself opens dialogue between the academic subjects. In this sense, we can describe practical theology as a dynamic subject that takes the context in which faith is played out into consideration. This means that practical theology will transcend barriers of the different academic disciplines and countries in

⁴⁸ Gerben Heitink, Reinder Bruisma (translator), *Practical Theology – History, Theory, Action Domains* <http://books.google.com.au> (accessed 10 May 2009) (Grand Rapids, B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999): xvi

which the research is done. Heitink describes it as follows “... some justice will be done to the interconfessional, interdisciplinary and international character of this branch of theology.”⁴⁹

Don Browning (as cited in Fahlbusch) has a similar view that practical theology is a wide subject. Browning describes practical theology as a subject that has a “...wide range of reflection from an identification of guiding theological metaphors and ethical principles to the formation of rules and roles that are appropriate to concrete contexts.”⁵⁰ In other words, the world situation and theological knowledge are correlated on an equal footing. Don Browning raises several valid issues when he asks questions such as – how theologians should understand the concrete situation in which they find themselves, what the praxis should be within that situation and how theologians can defend the norms of that praxis within the particular situation. He continues, suggesting that the fourth question should include the communication question. He adds further that when we know where people are in their ministry, then only, can the transformation process begin. To know ‘where people are at’ depends on our communication with them.⁵¹

The researcher believes that this is vital in the process of defining practical theology. Practical theology takes the position of secular society into consideration, so that all communication may be relevant and so bring in transformation. I believe that this is an important aspect of this particular study – the secular situation in the post-Christian society is considered and weighed against the Biblical norm of the Great

⁴⁹ Ibid, xvii

⁵⁰ Erwin Fahlbusch, translated Geoffrey W. Bromiley and David B. Barrett, *Encyclopaedia of Christianity* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 319

⁵¹ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 55-57

Commission. Now communication needs to take place in order to bring in transformation. In other words, practical theology completes the full hermeneutic circle as suggested by Browning.⁵² I believe that the completion of the hermeneutic circle is an advantage in practical theology because it brings about transformation. Jesus brought transformation when the Word became flesh. Lack of growth within the church calls for a process called transformation.

Don Browning, in his study on the perspectives, methods and praxis of practical theology, states that most university subjects are moving away from being entirely theory to being more technical and practical.⁵³ This means that all courses need a strong descriptive component. I believe this is an advantage because in many cases, such as this thesis, a strong descriptive component is necessary to bring the situation of a particular church to the fore in research.

Browning and Tracy have worked on a practical theology that has a correlational conversational approach.⁵⁴ In other words, there is a definite link between the so-called 'Christian fact' as penned by Tracy and the Christian text.⁵⁵ By considering the contemporary situation, practical theology becomes relevant to a changing world. All university subjects must have a practical component; otherwise they will never be relevant to a changing world. By taking the world-situation into consideration, subjects change to suit the needs of modern society. In theology, God's Word remains relevant for all time, but the practical theologian needs to

⁵² Ibid, 58

⁵³ Don Browning, *Methods and Foundations for Pastoral Studies in the University*, Pastoral studies in university, ed. Adrian Visscher (Ottawa: University Press, 1990), 50

⁵⁴ Don Browning, *Methods and Foundations for Pastoral Studies in the University*, Pastoral studies in university, ed. Adrian Visscher (Ottawa: University Press, 1990), 51

⁵⁵ Don Browning, *Methods and Foundations for Pastoral Studies in University*, Pastoral studies in university, ed. Adrian Visscher (Ottawa: University Press, 1990), 57

package this Word in a relevant way that it is transformational. The Whiteheads have taken this aspect a step further by suggesting a three-way dialogue between the present situation, the personal interpretation of the experience and the Christian witness. This three-way dialogue as suggested by Evelyn and James Whitehead brings culture into the foreground.⁵⁶ The researcher believes that this is important in this particular thesis as an essentially Asian church is studied within a Western setting.

David Tracy's revisionist correlational model of practical theology suggests a critical view of the situation, and its interpretation against that of the theory and praxis of the Christian fact.⁵⁷ I believe that this model is not suitable for this thesis because I would like to see a greater input in the model of the role God's Word plays.

Maddox suggests another view of practical theology should deal with the "placement of the church in the world and the resulting mission."⁵⁸ Maddox further suggests that this view is in agreement with Johannes Van der Ven and Rolf Zerfass.⁵⁹ This means that practical theology becomes more critical and should work more closely with other subjects. I do not agree that practical theology is so limited that it needs to depend on other subjects to prove its relevancy in a contemporary world. Few other subjects can boast that they have the eternal, infallible Word of God as part of their field. However, practical theology needs to be critical of the contemporary situation to test church life against the norm of God's Word.

⁵⁶ Don Browning, *Methods and Foundations for Pastoral Studies in the University*, Pastoral studies in the university, ed. Adrian Visscher (Ottawa: University Press, 1990), 57

⁵⁷ David Tracy, *The Foundations of Practical Theology*, ed. D.S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 76

⁵⁸ Randy L. Maddox, Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*. Vol. 18 (1991), 163

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 163

Having said that, Paul Ballard comes to mind where he suggests that theology should “...maintain a safe distance between itself and the Church.”⁶⁰ I believe that this could function as a type of ‘quality control’. Is this not important to prevent heretical teaching? I would like to make a further suggestion: all quality control of any nature in any career taught at university must have a practical component to complement the theory. Why is practical theology striving to prove itself as a relevant science worthy of its place at university if it is functioning in the same way as other subjects worthy of their place at university? Ballard suggests that practical theology holds together the poles of prescription and reflection.⁶¹ This is a critical and reflective situation that is also descriptive as suggested by Browning. Ballard mentions that church growth studies depend on other disciplines. While this could be true, the situation is entirely up to the practical theologian. The practical theologian will decide, according to the demands of his study, the extent of the input from other disciplines.

However, we cannot lose sight of the norms suggested by the Word. For this particular thesis on church growth, the researcher has depended very little on other disciplines, but had the Word as the norm throughout the study. However, there has been a highly descriptive element in this study because situations within the church context needed to be described to the reader. In other words, the contemporary situation has to be taken into account without losing sight of the Word. This fact further suggests that dialogue and communication are vital components of any

⁶⁰ Paul Ballard, *Practical theology as an academic discipline, Theology*. Vol. 98, no.782 (1995): 115

⁶¹ Paul Ballard, *Practical Theology as an academic discipline, Theology*. Vol 98,no 782 (1995): 117

model of practical theology. This fact demonstrates that practical theology does have an independent field of inquiry and is not merely an applied science.

Heitink, as cited in Lawler's comments from Creighton University, states that he sees practical theology as "Praxis in action" whereby he illustrates two praxes. The first praxis is the "mediation of the Christian faith" and the other is the "content in which Praxis 1 is played out..." Heitink understands practical theology as a vibrant subject that takes people in the real world into consideration while understanding how life works in the context of the Christian faith.⁶²

Gerben Heitink quotes Rolf Zerfass as follows: "practical theology has the task to lead in... [the] process of change in a way that is responsible from the perspective of both theology and the social sciences."⁶³ The researcher believes that this 'process of change' mentioned by Zerfass is the transformation theology whereby the critical analysis of situations by practical theologians can and will lead to transformation in theology. Don Browning suggests "...theological ethics as principle and procedure is crucial in practical theology is to equip the church to take a thoroughly critical role in public life."⁶⁴

Practical theology takes the world around it into consideration, but it needs to be critical of that world, so that the Word of God is not lost in a searching world. The researcher agrees with Browning that practical theology should become more critical

⁶² <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2000/2000-r6.html> (accessed 15 May 2009). Michael G. Lawler of Creighton University gives his views on Practical Theology in the Journal of Religion and Society. He further mentions Habermas' idea of practical theology being communication in action.

⁶³ Gerben Heitink, *Practical theology: History, theory, action domains* (Grand Rapids, B Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 113

⁶⁴ Don Browning - <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1373> (Accessed 10 May 2009)

in public life in the post-Christian areas especially. This thought ties in well with the researcher's point of view that practical theology needs to make itself heard in a world that tries to ignore God.

Pieterse (cited in van Wyk) suggests a situation of bipolar tension – in other words, the theory and practice interact in a particular situation.⁶⁵ This suggestion is particularly true for this particular thesis, in which the present post-Christian situation is taken into account alongside the Biblical order given by Jesus to complete the Great Commission. Pieterse prefers the inductive method of taking the situation into account and inductively inferring theological theories onto it. The researcher believes that this inductive method is really the same as the contextual approach as described by Wolfaardt in that “Practical Theology is the critical and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value, and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for the formation of persons and communities.”⁶⁶

The researcher believes that the contextual approach can lead to a change in the way we think about and interpret situations, therefore it is transformational, and as suggested earlier; this approach agrees with both Heitink and Zerfass' views. Burger (as cited in Msomi's research) suggests that the contextual approach does not seem

⁶⁵ A.G.van Wyk, *From “Applied Theology” to “Practical Theology”* (Andrews University Seminary Studies, 331 (1995): 93

⁶⁶ J.A Wolfaardt, et al, *Introduction to Practical Theology. Study Guide for PTA200-W* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992), 11 See also the critical-analytical aspect of practical theology raised by Wolfaardt in, *From “Applied Theology” to “Practical Theology”* (Andrews University Seminary Studies 331, 1995):101

different from the inductive method, but there is a slight difference in that it leads toward a practical theology for social transformation.⁶⁷

Goba (as cited in Msomi) suggests, “source material for this analysis would be personal observations and reflection.” According to Msomi, this supports the dialogical model of practical theology.⁶⁸

The researcher believes that the contextual approach and dialogical approach are very closely related simply because living in the real world will always result in personal experiences and observations. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the contextual approach to practical theology appears to be the best approach because it is also transformational. This approach also takes into consideration the communicative component of practical theology, in that, as Pieterse says, (as cited in Van Wyk), “Christians continually communicate with each other, with their Lord, and with people outside their religious community.”⁶⁹ This means that practical theology is a Communicative Theological Operational Science. Without the communication component, this thesis would not be possible, as the research is based on talking to the church members and pastor about their understanding and experience of the Christian faith. Van Wyk states that ‘...communication that

⁶⁷ Vivian Msomi, Recent Trends in Practical Theology, <http://www.sorat.ukn.ac.za/theology/bct/msomi.htm> (Accessed 15 May 2009).

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ A.G. van Wyk, *From “Applied Theology” to “Practical Theology”* (Andrews Seminary Studies 331, 1995), 93

mediates the faith OUTSIDE the church is also a valid object of study.”⁷⁰(My emphasis).

The communication of our faith outside of the church walls is a vital aspect of this particular thesis. Therefore this thesis is placed squarely in the field of practical theology.

The researcher suggests that these differences between the practical theologians are often very slight variances. However these differences of opinion have furthered dialogue within practical theology. Dialogue within a subject is healthy and a sign of vitality and growth. Practical theology has also not isolated itself as a subject, but has entered into dialogue with other subjects at university. These other subjects, for instance, the human science subjects, have further stimulated practical theology. God cannot be defined, therefore practical theology can define some of its study, but the area where it intersects with God’s work on earth can never be adequately defined.

1.6.2 Positioning in practical theology

The research process in this thesis is influenced by specific assumptions I have as a Westerner from what is perceived to be a Christian nation, who now finds herself in a post-Christian nation. However, the length of time that I have had as a minister in a so-called Christian nation as well as in a post-Christian nation gives me the ability to weigh up the situation critically. We are all influenced by certain personal

⁷⁰ A.G. van Wyk, *From “Applied Theology” to “Practical Theology”* (Andrews University Seminary 331, 1995), 95

subjectiveness, but this is what makes practical theology a versatile yet scientific subject.

I believe this thesis fits well into the framework that practical theology provides because practical theology is based on critical reflection of that which we experience in life within our struggle as Christians and ministers in a post-Christian setting.

Practical theology allows the researcher to be a participant observer in the field in which I am studying. It allows the researcher to have critical reflection on the NLCC studied and also to compare this to the problems the post-Christian climate creates for the minister of God's Word. Practical theology allows the researcher to study the theological data against the Christian belief and actions found within the NLCC and put them to use in the church at large.

Practical theology also allows the researcher to be a subjective witness because she is a participant observer within the church. As a member of the church, in spite of not being an Asian, the researcher is able to cultivate friendships and have good strong fellowship with the participants and in so doing, glean deeper information on the way the church members experience faith, worship and their understanding of God. These deep subjects cannot easily be discussed with a stranger. As a participant observer, the researcher has a greater chance of truly knowing how the Asian experiences God. Strydom suggests that there are advantages in being a participant observer. He says that the participant observer is not as intrusive as in other methods and therefore does not influence the participants' behaviour.⁷¹ The

⁷¹ H Strydom, "Information collection: participant observation" in *Research at Grass Roots*, Ed. A S de Vos with H Strydom, C B Fouche and C S L Delport (Pretoria: Hatfield, Van Schaik Publishers, 2003), 287-288

researcher in this case is also not as noticeable as an outsider would be in similar conditions. This means that the researcher gains an objective perspective on the situation. Data is gathered immediately and so proves dynamic in nature. Participant observers are able to gain and analyse data from non-verbal behaviour. This approach appeals to this particular thesis in that, Christian growth and spiritual experience, may be observed by the participant observer without being intrusive to the participants.

In turn, practical theology allows the researcher to put these experiences into perspective within the post-Christian era. The Asian participants themselves help to put the experiences into perspective in the post-Christian era because they are in this climate. All the participants travel to Asia several times a year and so are witnesses to how the Asian experiences church within Asia. In other words, the participants/ interviewees see the different ways of worship between the West and Asia and are able to comment on their experiences. This certainly sets the general tone of the study in their interviews.

The method chosen to glean information is to interview the different groups as mentioned earlier. This method gives the researcher access to the different groups in the church – such as founder members, youth, worship team members, first-generation Christians and those who have returned from mission trips – and allows the researcher to interview as many people as possible in the church. Many first-generation Christians were found in each group. The material produced from the interviews provides insight into how the Asian experiences and understands the concepts of church, church growth, God, worship, prayer and his calling in the Great

Commission. A theory can be formulated from the interviews because of the age groups targeted and the fact that first-, second- and third-generation Christians were included. The researcher believes that the information gleaned could provide the building blocks for a practical theological theory for practice in the post-Christian church.

The study of the NLCC and its functioning is done in the qualitative paradigm. This gives the researcher the opportunity to understand people in their own cultural setting. The qualitative paradigm is more flexible and the exploratory nature allows a design to form as progress is made in the research. The qualitative paradigm is more subjective and so one can understand the growth and maturation of individuals in a deeper context. For instance, people all perceive their experiences on mission differently, so the qualitative paradigm will allow for these differences of perception.

1.7 Resources of research

1.7.1 The interviews

The researcher believes that structured interviews are the most helpful in obtaining the information important to this particular study. For instance, structured interviews allow first-generation Christians to illustrate best how they understand church, church growth, mission and conversion. Structured questions put to members who have returned from mission, give the researcher an idea of what motivates them to go on mission and how they experience mission and whether it has made a difference in their walk with God.

The youth interviewed illustrate how they see their role within the church and what ministries they are involved in. It is interesting to see why the older members allow the youngsters to be so active in the church.

The interview with the pastor gives the researcher an idea on how he perceives church, church growth, mission, and ministry of individuals within the church and also how he sees the role of the youth within the church. How the pastor manages the first-generation Christians within the church is an important question. This could prove vital to maturing first-generation Western Christians.

The Asian perception of worship of God and conversion as opposed to merely salvation, as practiced in the Western church is investigated. How do they look after the new Christians? How do they mature so quickly? Why do they go on outreach so soon?

I believe that all of these aspects are best investigated by structured interviews. It is important to ask specific structured questions so that we can find specific answers to certain questions. It is also important that people understand that they may offer more detailed explanations on their perception on the deeper topics such as worship.

Interviews allow the investigator to ask additional questions at the time of the interview should an interviewee not fully understand a question that is asked. The researcher could also ask additional questions for a greater understanding of the question at hand. For instance, the researcher is interested in interviewing the founder members to see why they started their own Asian church instead of joining

a Western church – was it a language or cultural problem or something else?

Interviews allow the researcher to detect why the members of the church are so active within their ministry calling and what motivates them to be so outreaching that they appear to be wall-less.

1.7.2 Other resources in the research

In order to facilitate the research the following resources were consulted. The primary source of information is the NLCC in Perth where different groups of people answer questions by the use of interviews regarding their understanding of church, church growth, the Great Commission and how they understood salvation and conversion. It is also important to understand their concept of God, prayer and mission and outreach and worship.

The use of structured questions in interviews works best in order to receive more pertinent answers. The interview group divisions are as follows: founder members of the church and why they felt the need to plant an Asian church in Perth, first-generation Christians, those who have returned from mission trips, the worship team and also the youth leaders. The interview with the pastor and his thoughts on the above concepts forms an important part of the research. Background information gleaned on the pastor helps to understand his frame of reference. It is often remarked upon that the church will take on the flavour of the pastor or the anointing of the pastor.

A random sample group of Western Christians from various church backgrounds to function as an opinion-bouncing group needs to be in place to detect their understanding of church, the Great Commission and worship.

Secondary resources consulted were those written on the Back to Jerusalem Movement of the Chinese church as well as more recent literature by Brother Yun on his role in the Chinese church while under heavy persecution. I realise that the most accurate information one could glean about the Chinese church would be from somebody who was part of the church but was able to speak freely. We must understand that information on the Chinese house churches is not readily available because of the security surrounding their meetings and mission trips. The books consulted were: *Back to Jerusalem* as well as *Heavenly Man* and *Living Water*, all by Brother Yun.

I also have access via email to Paul Hattaway who works closely with the persecuted church in China and has been the co-author of Brother Yun's books. Hattaway could shed much light on the Chinese church from a Westerner's point of view. I thought that the secondary resources consulted were vital in understanding the Asians' concept of church and their experience of God. Other books on the Chinese/Asian church were David Aikman: *Jesus in Beijing*, and also Tony Lambert: *China's Christian Millions*.

Other resources consulted have been literature on the Great Commission as well as literary resources on the Western churches in general and their struggle to remain relevant and growing in the society and climate they find themselves in. Some of the books consulted were as follows:

George Barna: *Boiling Point* that proved helpful to glean facts and figures on churches and especially the house church movement in the West. David Orton: *Snakes in the Temple* gives background to aspects of Western worship especially as regards so-called anointed entertainment. Lynn and Bill Hybels: *Rediscovering church* gives insight into modelling one's life on Christ. Other basic background on the Western church was gleaned from the following sources: Ray Anderson: *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* as well as Michael Moyhagh: *emergingchurch.intro*. Frank Damazio: *The Gate Church*, Hirsch Frost: *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Rick Warren: *The Purpose Driven Church* and Jim Cymbala: *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*.

Other sources that helped show a faithful church in our deceptive times is Gary E. Gilley: *This Little Church Stayed at Home* and *This Little Church Went to Market* explaining the concept of the modern church either reaching out or selling out. Most helpful for understanding church and church growth were the following resources. Winter, Hawthorne: *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* and Paul E. Engle and Gary L. McIntosh: *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*.

1.8 Definitions and limitation

It is wise to understand certain core terms and concepts that are used throughout this thesis.

1) *Western church* is a broad term used to define churches within the developed world that have long histories within the regions they find themselves. The Western church is usually independent financially and may have sent missionaries to other areas where the Christian message needed to be spread.

ii) *Post-Christian areas* refer to areas around the world where there has been a decline in church attendance recently. Usually the country concerned has indicated that their latest census recorded a drop in number of people indicating that they consider themselves to be Christian.

iii) *Wall-less* is a concept used to describe a church that appears to be reaching out and making disciples outside of its usual area of influence. The people within the church appear to reach out to others and spread the Gospel without necessarily expecting those new converts to ever come to or join the evangelist's so-called home church.

Barna suggests that; "Churches without institutional walls are loosely organized gatherings of believers focused almost exclusively on spiritual growth and mission."⁷²

In other words, the wall-less church reaches out for Jesus' sake and to glorify His Name and not merely to enlarge a church.⁷³

The definition of a wall-less church falls within the constraints of practical theology when one takes into consideration the view of Zerfass (as cited in Heitink)⁷⁴ and Browning⁷⁵. Browning suggests that practical theology equips the church to take on a critical role in public life. This suggestion agrees with Zerfass who suggests practical theology is transformational. In other words, practical theology takes a critical role in public life to bring about transformation by keeping the church relevant within the

⁷² <http://www.thorncrownjournal.com?turners/churchgrowth.html>

Article: "Church Growth Turns Another Corner."

⁷³ See a greater explanation on the wall-less church in the final paragraph under Point 1.2.1)

⁷⁴ Gerben Heitink, *Practical theology: History, theory, action domains* (Grand Rapids, B Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 113

⁷⁵ Don Browning, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1371> (accessed 10 May 2009)

society in which it finds itself. The wall-less concept of church brings the church to the people, because they no longer come to church easily of their own accord in the post-Christian era or areas.

iv) *The Great Commission* refers to the order Jesus gave in Matthew chapter 28:18-20 "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."⁷⁶

Charles Van Engen describes the Great Commission by saying that the church must confess the Lordship of Christ. This confession moves the church towards universality and in so doing it moves outward to the nations.⁷⁷

v) *The Back to Jerusalem Movement* is a vision the Chinese Church has to preach the Word across all the countries and ethnic groups between China and Jerusalem. The vision for this calling was given to the "Jesus Family" in the 1920's. The vision is to evangelise all the unreached nations that lie between China and Jerusalem. This is no small task because the strongholds of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism lie in the direct route.⁷⁸ Hattaway has written a history of the Back to Jerusalem Movement in his book.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *New International Version* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988)

⁷⁷ Charles van Engen, "The Uniqueness of Christ", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed, Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 167

⁷⁸ Paul Hattaway, Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze and Enoch Wang, *Back to Jerusalem* (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003)

⁷⁹ The book, *Back to Jerusalem*, contains the full account of the first call of God to the Chinese House Churches to take the Gospel in a westward direction back to Jerusalem. It also covers present day accounts of the house churches as they spread the Gospel back to Jerusalem.

vi) Church vision refers to the church having a plan to increase numbers by targeting specific people or groups within the community. These targeted people will be followed up and invited to church, thereby increasing the numbers within the local church.

vii) Transfer growth is a term used to define numerical growth of the local church by gaining extra numbers from surrounding churches. Transfer growth is common in areas where a church becomes popular and as it grows, people from the smaller surrounding churches leave their places of worship to follow the more popular church. The most common transfer growth is found when traditional churches lose members to the more charismatic church in the area. In other words, new members to the church have merely relocated from another Christian church and are not newcomers to the Gospel of Christ.

viii) Conversion growth is a term used to define people who have not believed in the Gospel or have had no previous exposure to the Gospel. When these individuals begin to serve God we can call it conversion growth. Conversion growth within the church context means that these particular individuals have never been to another Christian church. In the Western context, conversion growth may refer to people who have heard the gospel, rejected it initially and later came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

ix) First-generation Christians are believers who have had no previous exposure to Christian doctrine or belief from their families. This term is often used within the Asian church where family members of the new converts have either been Buddhists, freethinkers or atheists. Frequently, first-generation Christians within a

particular family are ostracised by their direct family in the early stages of conversion.

x) *Salvation* is a term used to express the moment a person believes that Jesus is their Saviour and Lord. At this point of salvation they devote their lives to Jesus and are commonly known as 'saved' within the Western church terminology. Salvation is often accompanied by the saying of the sinner's prayer (a prayer of repentance and devotion of the individual's life from henceforth to the Lord) at the time of the pulpit call.

xi) *Altar/Pulpit call* is a term loosely used to indicate the moment in which the pastor of the church calls people to the front for prayer. The idea is that elders and church attendants can pray for those who respond to this call. The pulpit call will bring those attending church closer to the heart of the church in which they will be known by name and be invited to become Christians or members of the church.

xii) *Conversion* is a process in which the new Christian is taught the way of Jesus. The person must turn from his own will to do the will of God.⁸⁰ As Jesus taught His disciples by showing them the way of the Kingdom of God, so today conversion is a process in which the individual is discipled within the church by other members so that they not only know the Word of God, but also implement the Word in daily life. George Patterson teaches that the church will grow if we disciple the people as Jesus said.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 355

⁸¹ George Patterson, "The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches", in *Perspectives in the World Christian Movement 3rd ed.* Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 597

xiii) Outreach is a term used to indicate an activity where the members of the church reach outside of the four walls of the church and make contact with people who may not necessarily be Christian. Outreach need not take place in teams or be a specifically organized activity by the church. Outreach could be an individual Christian making contact with a non-Christian by either inviting that person to church or teaching him about Jesus. However, the most effective outreach has come from people movements and not individuals. The success of the church in advancing into new areas based on a people-movement outreach was studied by Chua Wee Hian who studied church planting in China.⁸²

xiv) Un-churched people is used in this thesis to refer to people who live in areas where they can easily have contact with Christians and church but have chosen not to do so for their own reasons. From practical experience we see this on a daily basis in a country such as Australia where un-churched people have never had specific Christian teaching but are aware of Christmas and Easter and celebrate these as holidays but from an entirely secular point of view. The name of God or Jesus is often referred to in conversation, but as a derogatory term or oath.

xv) Maturity in spirit is used to describe people who have matured in their Christian walk. They have had a hunger to study God's Word and have grown in their knowledge of the Word and are able to apply it practically in their lives. In other words, the spirit of the individual becomes filled with the Spirit of the Living God. Bob Gordon describes this concept as being guided by the Holy Spirit in all things regarding Christ. He takes this further saying that this knowledge of God needs to go

⁸² Chua Wee Hian, "Evangelization of Whole Families", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (Pasadena: California, William Carey Library, 2004), 619

beyond the fruit-bearing stage of personal holiness and propel us into areas of witnessing the Gospel, evangelising those we meet and also winning souls to Christ.⁸³

xvi) Chinese church in this thesis refers to the churches within Mainland China. For the purposes of this study I have only considered the house churches of China because they are the fastest-growing sector of the Chinese church. Brother Yun is a member of the house churches of China and uses their experiences as a reference point when he compares the Western church to the Chinese church.

xvii) House church is a concept that refers to churches in Asia that meet at different times in the homes of the people who are serving God, in the same way as the early Christians of the New Testament did. Acts 2:46, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people...”

The leader of the house church is known as the shepherd because they spend time with God and receive direction from God’s Word as to how to guide the church. A network of house churches could have as many as 100 000 members. They do not publish their meeting times and places for fear of the government authorities and are therefore purely Spirit-led in their activities.

1.9 The arrangement of the thesis

The following plan of each chapter allows the reader to realise the objectives in this thesis and indicate the path the researcher takes in order to achieve the final result.

⁸³ Bob Gordon, *The Disciple’s Handbook for the Spirit-filled Life* (England: Kent, Sovereign World Ltd, 1993),12

Chapter two introduces the reader to the general feeling in the Western church on its understanding of church as well as what it perceives to be church growth. This is followed by a study of the Asian church and what it perceives church and church growth to be. This study introduces the reader to the perceived differences in perception between the Western and Asian churches as regards their understanding of these two aspects. Has worldliness dimmed the Western mind?

Chapter three discusses the meaning of the Great Commission. The chapter is an overview of the Biblical understanding of the Great Commission but the researcher seeks to understand whether the Asian understanding of the Great Commission is different to the way it is understood generally by the Western Christian. In this chapter the researcher interviews a random group of Western Christians on their understanding of the Great Commission so that an opinion-bouncing group could be set up to compare the outcome.

Chapter four covers the interviews carried out with a group of founder members of the New Life City Church. The researcher introduces the reader to the reason the New Life City Church set up an Asian church in a Western setting. The interviews shed light on the history of the New Life City Church. As the study unfolds it is important that the reader understands how the church started and why it operates as a wall-less church.

Chapter five seeks to provide information to the reader on the interviews conducted with first-generation Christians in the New Life City Church. It is important to show the reader how first-generation Christians understand vital issues such as salvation, church, mission, prayer, fellowship and brotherhood and how they understand the

sovereignty of God. Most first-generation Christians come from a background of multiple-god religions so this was a relevant part of the study. The question of spiritual warfare will be raised during the interviews because of the previous multiple-god religions the interviewees had been exposed to. The interviews take into consideration their past belief systems and how this influenced the length of time they took to spread the Gospel to their families and others around them. The researcher considers what support mechanisms within the church proved the most helpful or effective in helping the first-generation Christian to feel secure within Christianity. This is a vital part of the study because it sheds light on how the Western church needs to put mechanisms in place to help first-generation Christians in the post-Christian setting.

Chapter six puts the reader into the picture as regards the New Life City church and its understanding of mission. Interviews with church members who had returned from mission were conducted to see how they had been prepared for mission and how they had experienced mission. The researcher assesses the effect of going on mission trips and how or whether it has influenced or made a difference to the interviewees walk with God. The fact that the New Life City Church sends several mission teams out each year is interesting because the researcher detects what motivated a church to be so mission-conscious that it appears to be wall-less.

Chapter seven covers the role that the youth play within the New Life City Church. This chapter is included in part of this study because the church is made up of 75% young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years. This is a most unusual phenomenon in the post-Christian era. The researcher covers areas of the youth

such as Sunday school, Overdrive (the younger teen sector), Joshua Life (the student outreach of the church) as well as Twelve Stones (the young working adults). These areas are included in the study because it allows the researcher to study the church in the areas where outreach takes place most easily. Their methods and understanding of outreach are necessary to understand the wall-less nature of the church.

Chapter eight covers the interview with the pastor of the New Life City Church and how he copes with first-generation Christians in a Western setting. It is important for the researcher to cover a short history of the pastor's spiritual life so that the reader can understand the pastor's perception of certain functions within the church. These include what he thinks would be the most effective way of leading people to the Lord as well as how the New Life City Church is so effective in involving people in the different areas of the church. The researcher needs to understand what the pastor understands by church and church growth. The question rose as to how the pastor perceives a wall-less church and if that was the initial plan for the New Life City Church. The methods that the pastor employed in his previous huge church in Asia will also discussed. The pastor is involved in the Lausanne Movement and this is discussed in the light of how it influences his pasturing of the church. The researcher investigates what the pastor understands by the Great Commission and mission in general. The church covering and constitution will also be a point of discussion in the interview.

Chapter nine covers the interviews of members of the New Life City Church on what they understand by worship. Does the Asian understanding of worship differ from

the Western church understanding? With this in mind the researcher felt the need to ask a diverse group of Western Christians about their understanding of worship. Is worship an activity within the church only? Does it need to spill outwards into society so that the church becomes a wall-less army of God? Is this how His Word is spread into the entire world? Is this how the Great Commission could be completed?

Chapter ten in conclusion shows us the major differences between the Asian, such as the NLCC, and Western churches. These differences are taken into consideration and suggestions made to inspire the church to become a wall-less army of God moving forward in God's grace and mercy to complete the Great Commission, yet remaining relevant in society.

1.10 Summary

Chapter one suggests that there are differences to be observed when comparing the post-Christian church in many Western countries, particularly Australia and the Asian Christian church. A unique situation exists in Perth where there is an Asian Christian church that appears to bear all the hallmarks of the Asian church, in spite of its Western setting. This church, the New Life City Church will be studied in the context in which it is, that is Perth. I believe that this church can be more easily observed than an Asian church in Asia that may possibly be under threat or persecution. The New Life City Church appears to be wall-less and takes the Great Commission seriously. It also appears to mature new Christians quickly to the outreach stage. I believe that if I am able to make certain observations on how it functions, I could deduce what so-called growth mechanisms are used successfully in this Western context. Once that has been done, these mechanisms could possibly be

implemented within the Western church where outreach and growth is less pronounced. This is where practical theology will play a role, it allows the researcher to be a participant observer and take the experience of the Christians into consideration. It allows for critical reflection while the qualitative paradigm encourages deeper understanding of certain concepts found within the church and the interviewees' understanding of these concepts, while taking their culture into consideration.

CHAPTER 2

CHURCH AND CHURCH GROWTH

2.1 The background to understanding the need to compare the Western and Asian church

In order to pinpoint reasons for lack of church growth in the post-Christian areas, it was deemed necessary to include a study of how the Western church views itself and how it understands church growth and compare that with the understanding the Asian church has about these two concepts. The Asian church is focussed on specifically because it is the fastest growing church in the world today. The known growth is around 10 000 converts per day.⁸⁴ I refer here specifically to known growth because of the secrecy of some communities in Asia that do not make facts and figures known because of fear of persecution. It is important to understand the Asian church in order to pinpoint the reasons for this phenomenal growth. One can then explore whether the current understanding of church and church growth has an influence on our ability to reach out and complete the Great Commission by becoming a wall-less church.

In many instances, the Western church has not seen the growth that the Asian church is experiencing. Some Western churches have started to cater for various community needs under the one roof, in the hope that those in need would also hear the Gospel.⁸⁵ This phenomenon has given a false impression, in that the large

⁸⁴ Barrett and Johnson, *Table 1-1 in World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001), 3

⁸⁵ Roof – refers to the covering or authority the church operates under, such as a governing body put in place to regulate church function of all congregations that fall under their care or governance.

churches of the West are not necessarily made up of new converts, but transfers from smaller, often traditional churches. The transfers are often fuelled by the need some people feel to belong in a large church where 'things are happening' and where the youth are hopefully entertained. This phenomenon in turn leads to the local church having various programs to cater for the needs of the people.

However, the problem seems to be that the people *outside the church* are not likely to be drawn in unless they are approached.⁸⁶ The invitation of 'come to church with me' may have led the un-believer to think that God may be found in the church only. The suggestion here is that the church building, according to the typical Western perception, represents the broader societal definition of 'church'. The invitation to 'come to church with me' is a possible indication of lack of confidence to witness more readily in more 'on the spot' situations by most Christians. We need to find out if or why this is so.

There seems to be a strong emerging trend whereby the majority of people are not Christians in Western countries. In the 1700s the Western church was considered the centre, so to speak, of Christianity. Germany, United Kingdom and America were considered the foremost proponents of Christianity. These trendsetting nations sent out missionaries to spread the Gospel across the world.

In terms of this thesis the situation in Australia should be highlighted. Australia is said to be typical of a post-Christian country due to the fact that 68% of the population claimed to be Christian in 2001 as opposed to a rather more staggering

⁸⁶ Outside the church is a term meant to describe people who are not involved in the Christian church in any active way.

86% in 1970.⁸⁷ In June 2005 the Anglican Archbishop Roger Herft mentioned that the church was considering changing church from Sunday worship to Saturday to cater for the changing needs of Australian society.⁸⁸ If most of Australia is post-Christian, one must consider what makes a church in Australia, such as the New Life City Church; appear to be wall-less and outward-reaching.

New Life City Church gives one the chance to study a unique situation in this thesis when it is considered that the NLCC is an Asian church within a post-Christian Western setting. Matters that need to be investigated and addressed include whether the Asian church defines 'church' and its position within this differently from other, more Western churches, as well as whether Western Christians and Asian Christians perceive the concept of church growth differently. Once these avenues of difference are explored, one can make an informed analysis that will, theoretically, hold the key to the outlook churches have on mission, growth, and maturation of individuals within the church as well as their understanding of the changes a converted life brings.

The aim of this study is to determine how Australian society, in the post-Christian West, have the potential to be a dynamic, growing and outward looking church community (with mature, passion filled members), who are serious about fulfilling the Great Commission. This would inherently suggest that the church needs to be prompted and encouraged to grow through movement in the current first world setting. It can be suggested that the church must not only grow in numbers, but in

⁸⁷ Ben Spencer and Dawn Gibson, "Church may drop Sunday services," *The West Australian*, 13 June, 2005, 1

⁸⁸ Spencer and Gibson, "Church may drop Sunday services," *The West Australian*, 13 June 2005, 1

the maturing of the individuals within the body of Christ. This would further imply the duty of mature individuals to reach out to those who do not know Christ. Biblically speaking, every individual who knows Christ is a missionary and should reach outside of the four walls of the church. Scripture records Jesus reminding the disciples to reach out. We see this in John 20:21-22 'Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."'”⁸⁹

In this study of the NLCC as an Asian church in a Western setting, it is hoped that one would be able to pinpoint the principles used in the church to grow individuals into a dynamic wall-less church. These principles may be applied to other post-Christian churches to increase growth of individuals as well as to increase awareness of the need to complete the Great Commission.

The questions specified above may only be answered after we consider the Western church in general and then compare it to the Asian church. NLCC will be a case study of this type of analysis as it is an Asian church nestled in a Western setting. It is through this case study that aspects of the Asian Christian understanding of church and mission will be uncovered, and a consideration of how we can apply them to the

⁸⁹ *New International Version* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). Other references for further reading include the following Scripture verses. Acts 1:7-8, Acts 2: 38-41, Ephesians 10: 10 and 20-21. Verse 21 shows us that the glory to Jesus must be in the church. Jesus receives more glory as the church grows. 2 Cor 4:15 also mentions that as grace reaches more people, thanksgiving will give more glory to God. 2 Peter 3:9 shows that the Lord does not want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. This takes us back squarely to the Great Commission where we are taught to REPENT and be baptised and go out and make disciples. Philippians 1:6 brings our attention to the fact that the good work that Jesus has started in us he will carry on to its completion until the day of the Lord. In other words, the work of the church can never be complete until the Lord comes. All churches and Christians are called to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Western church so that it too, can become a wall-less, dynamic church – even in a post-Christian setting, will be expressed.

2.2 *The Western church*

The West has a long history of church being held in a particular type of building with a certain understanding of the function of clergy as opposed to laity. This tradition has developed over many years, but has changed since the 1980s with the so-called *seeker-sensitive* church that started to develop.⁹⁰ However, in spite of charismatic/Pentecostal churches trying to change and swing away from the traditional ways of doing things, the Western church has seemingly appeared to shrug off its way of understanding the concept: ‘church’. In order to understand how the Western church perceives church and church growth, one must first analyse what they understand by church.

In understanding ‘church’ it seems that the Western church sees the definition to refer to a particular building and specific religious constructs that are related to a particular traditional past where Christians would gather to hear God’s Word. The charismatic or Pentecostal churches often avoid traditional backgrounds and tend to feel safer under a well-known name such as “Vineyard”, “Potter’s House”, “Joyce Meyer Ministries”, and “Benny Hinn Ministries”. Nothing has changed much in the West – the freedom they strove for has not been achieved because many find themselves under another set of rules, under a guise of proposed modernity.

⁹⁰ Seeker Sensitive churches are churches that have several activities under the roof of the church throughout the week, so that those who seek out the Truth may come and join in without being threatened by the Gospel in any way. These activities are often more socially geared than Gospel related. More information on seeker sensitive churches later in this chapter.

According to Barrett and Johnson Independent or Post- denominationalists have grown to 19%.⁹¹ This means 386 million Independents in 220 countries avoid historic denominationalist Christianity. In 1900 Pentecostals/Charismatics/ Neocharismatics numbered 1 million and have grown to 524 million affiliated and a further 78 million unaffiliated believers. This is indicative of the fact that the Western church is fragmented on many issues. It seems that the full body of Christ does not move forward to complete the Great Commission as it is preoccupied by competition, personal comfort and outward appearance. The church is viewed narrowly as the local church - with a small 'c'. George Barna explains as follows. "We found that there is a significant distinction in the minds of many people between the local church – with a small 'c' – and the universal Church – with a capital 'C'.⁹²

It can be said that in a general sense the Western church envisions a building when speaking about church. Church is largely understood to be a Sunday activity in which somebody leads a meeting about the Gospel. Invariably the leadership is modelled on a more worldly understanding – that is, somebody to take charge often by popular vote and is assisted by several people who have also been elected by the rest of the church members. Services are largely influenced by worldly methods of entertainment in which the body of the church serves largely as an audience to the few who have been elected to certain tasks.

⁹¹ Barrett and Johnson *Table 1-1 2001: World Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001),3

⁹² The Barna Group, *A Faith Revolution is Redefining Church*,

Link- <http://www.barna.org> and source <http://www.joelnew.org>

In this article Barna argues that Americans are leaving local churches because they want more of God in their lives. In other words, instead of going to church, they become the Church such as we have seen in the book of Acts.

We may argue that the Western church has a certain way of worship, in the sense that churches tend to go along with the current trend that appears to work in the more popular churches. However, one wonders if the Western church is easily swayed by the world. It seems the Western church tries to attract the unbeliever by making church look attractive and familiar, as well as by meeting the needs of those who seek more in life. This approach may lead to the compromising of the Godly standard as laid out in the Gospel. For example, Andy Zoppelt describes the current American church to be the Harlot church. He explains that the Harlot church runs the church as a corporation. He feels that it is grounded in worldly philosophy. He believes that charismatic men can easily sway the masses that may cause the great falling away mentioned in the book of Revelation. Zoppelt furthers his argument, saying that this particular system does not deal with sin or mature the believer. Further, he refers to it as a system of compromise that encourages division and competition among God's people.⁹³

To explain this statement further, one needs to consider the following concepts found in the Western church:

⁹³ Andy Zoppelt. TheRealChurch.com (Accessed 9 January 2005). Further reading can be found at the following websites. <http://www.meatindueseason.org//> and <http://insearchofacity.homestead.com/files/articles.html>

2.2.1 Sinner's prayer

There appears to be an overwhelming emphasis on the sinner's prayer as a means to salvation, when there is no confirmed Biblical evidence of a *sinner's prayer*.⁹⁴

Although the Gospel does encourage repentance and confession as the first part of a 'process' in which the individual's life changes, it is evident that this 'process' is often left out of many churches and so salvation is emphasised at the cost of conversion.⁹⁵

Gary Gilley suggests that Rick Warren's prayer in 40 Days of Purpose (that accompanies *The Purpose Driven Life* book) shows a lack of Biblical foundation in which Warren suggests that "...all you need to do is receive and believe..."⁹⁶ Here there is a lack of repentance and the cross is not mentioned; therefore it seems that grace is cheapened.

2.2.2 Maturation of individual Christians, discipleship and relativism

The maturation of the new Christian does not appear to be a high priority. Rather their attendance at Sunday worship is. Generally most churches assume the Christian will mature by simply attending church services, often at the cost of discipleship.

Jesus is our perfect example of the Shepherd who tended the flock by discipling them first, so that they would be mature enough to walk the mission and outreach

⁹⁴ Sinner's prayer is a prayer of repentance and asking Jesus to come into their heart to live there. This prayer is considered to be the giving of one's life to the Lord and therefore, the person is considered to be a newborn Christian from that moment. These prayers are encouraged as a way of the new Christian making a commitment to have Jesus in their life and to follow the way of the Gospel. This prayer is often used at a so-called altar call.

⁹⁵ Andrew Strom has written an in-depth Bible study on the lost foundations of the Gospel. For more information on the fact that the 'sinner's prayer' is not Biblical, the reasons the disciples baptized new believers immediately and other foundational truths not preached correctly, according to Strom, in the present day church, see <http://www.revivalschool.com/Shocking-Bible-Study.html> (Accessed 7 July 2009).

⁹⁶ Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 107

path. It seems the emphasis on church attendance makes the Western church feel more secure when it sees 'numbers' within the church rather than mature Christians.

Maturation of new Christians will depend on the discipleship the new Christian receives within the church. The discipleship of the individual is dependent on the conversion path and not just the salvation moment. The suggestion here is that after salvation the person who has been saved needs to walk a path of conversion in which they are taught that their life needs to change. The turning from sin to Christ is aptly mentioned in Acts 26:18, "...to turn them from darkness to light..." This verse describes conversion as the turning away from the old ways of life and embracing the new. It is when this conversion has been taken seriously that the person will be ready and able to walk the path of discipleship with members of the church who have been trained to work with new Christians. Undoubtedly, there is an overlapping area from conversion to discipleship, but one cannot pinpoint it at this stage of the study. It seems that discipleship among new members is not pronounced in the Western church. Instead of discipleship courses, a trend towards various membership classes is seen. It could be suggested that this could lead to a slower maturation of new converts.

According to Barna, "America's love affair with relativism even influences how we think about and engage in ministry."⁹⁷ He expands the consequences of this statement by making the following suggestion. "...relativism undermines the need for discipleship."⁹⁸ This is a frightening comment, because Jesus' ministry is seen as training disciples to go out and spread the Gospel. We need to consider the role

⁹⁷ George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (California: Ventura, Regal Books, 2001), 83

⁹⁸ Barna and Hatch, *Boiling Point*, 84

discipleship plays in the NLCC in order to determine whether discipleship keeps the passion for the Gospel alive and in so doing, whether it prevents relativism from being as pronounced as Barna suggested. When we look at relativism we see that some preachers make the *Word* sound negotiable in their sermons in an effort to avoid offending listeners.⁹⁹ In the light of the above statement, Barna declares that several values have been abandoned by Christians, these include – “radical obedience, church loyalty, discipline, persecution, Biblical knowledge, elder care, salvation by grace alone, holiness, patience, confessions of sins, theological purity...”¹⁰⁰

Additionally, Gilley has suggested that the modern Christian in the West believes that the Bible is not enough to cope with life, as we know it today. He goes on to say, “...the vast majority of both evangelicals and Fundamentalists believe the Scriptures are either inadequate or incomplete in communicating what the Christian needs to know when navigating the important issues of life.”¹⁰¹ It can be said that the negotiable tendency in many Western churches has laid less stress on the power of the Word. When the Word is no longer the central ‘tool’ of the church, the church may become less powerful and influential among people. The Word is Holy Spirit inspired and so, should of itself influence the lives of those who study it. It can be suggested that the cries of the Western church regarding revival may be futile. If the church as God originally intended it to be is dead, one must begin to question how it can be effectively revived. It appears as if the Western church is in need of

⁹⁹ Word – refers to the Word of God or the Bible. In this thesis, whenever Word is written with a capital letter, it refers to the Holy Bible.

¹⁰⁰ George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point*, (California: Ventura, Regal Books, 2001), 89

¹⁰¹ Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 88

resuscitation and new life, and by studying the life still enjoyed by the Asian church it is hoped that the Western church will be able to learn once more how to reach out to the lost effectively.

2.2.3 Obedience

Barna suggests that American churches value independence above church membership.¹⁰² He takes this point further when he illustrates that ‘radical obedience’ is one of the values that has been abandoned by Christians.¹⁰³ Further he suggests that Americans are depicted as “...independent and self-reliant rather than dependent on God. We bask in our own autonomy and defiance rather than seek humility and strive for obedience.”¹⁰⁴

Grace is preached, but less stress is placed on obedience. Obedience needs to follow after we have experienced the grace of God. Obedience to God’s Word is often compromised because the West considers that ‘everyone has the right to choose.’ Obedience, according to Kraft, is misunderstood in the church. The church understands disobedience to be the breaking of God’s rules, rather than unfaithfulness to God. Kraft suggests that obedience should be understood relationally.¹⁰⁵

Compromise is a sign of the Western church trivialising devotion and commitment to Christ. Could this be a sign of the Laodicean church as mentioned in the Book of Revelation? Additionally, whether the church has compromised by obeying some of

¹⁰² George Barna, *Boiling Point* (USA: California, Regal Books, 2001), 87 and 90

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 89

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 225

¹⁰⁵ Charles H Kraft. *Confronting Powerless Christianity* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Chosen Books, 2002), 92

the Word at the cost of the rest should also be taken into account. For instance, we see in the book of Romans chapter 1 and verse 27 how God hates homosexuality and finds it an abomination. Yet, some churches are ordaining homosexual priests because of social pressure. Is this partial obedience a sign of the modern Western church? Does the Asian church suffer from similar social pressure? Does a church that bows to social pressure, lose its passion? Are they going to obey the world at the cost of the body of Christ? How spotless is the *Bride*?¹⁰⁶ Andrew Gih makes the following comment about revival.

God's program for reviving His people is definite and clear. First Elijah 'repaired the altar of Jehovah that was thrown down.' That is the place to begin. All the ruin that sin has wrought must be cleared away by confession. Things must be made right with God; restitution must be made where it is due. Unless this is done definitely and thoroughly, prayer for reviving is vain. Too many are praying today without repairing the altar by confession of sin, without digging a trench of separation from the world and without a surrender that is even unto death. No wonder such prayer is fruitless.¹⁰⁷

Hence, it can be suggested that the church cannot hold onto old worldly ways and expect God to bless it.

¹⁰⁶ Bride refers to the church depicted as the bride of Christ. See Eph 5:25-27, Rev 19:7-9; 21:1-2,9-27; 22:17

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Gih, *More Great Quotes* in <http://www.Sermonindex.net> (Accessed 28 May 2008).

2.2.4 Repentance

Repentance and the concept of dying to oneself appear to have become watered down to acceptance of others and the need to get as much as one can out of the church. Wilkerson has summed this up clearly in one of his sermons.¹⁰⁸ He says: “Oh, how blind the church has become. And how blind so many shepherds are now. Churches that once believed in sacrifice, self-denial and cross-bearing have become corrupted by flesh. Their focus is now totally on self, on material things, on the good life, not the holy life.”

It is interesting to see that David Wilkerson, once a popular preacher in America, is seldom asked to be a guest speaker in his country because his views are considered to be unpopular. His views do not make people feel good as so many modern sermons do, but rather, they confront the Western Christian. Conviction makes one uneasy. So-called ‘feel good’ sermons do not confront the sinful nature within mankind. Kraft suggests sin and repentance should be dealt with rather than demons because the Western worldview assumes a single cause for any problem.¹⁰⁹ Could failure to repent, prevent the believer’s life changing and cause lack of passion to spread the Gospel beyond the wall of the church? Without repentance there is no conversion. Without conversion, no new lives are added to the church. Gilley brings our attention to the lack of repentance in the church when he says:

The understanding that salvation is the result of God’s *grace alone*, received through *faith alone* in *Christ alone*, was the cornerstone of the Reformation

¹⁰⁸ David Wilkerson, “Guarding the Sheep,” sermon delivered 15 November 2004 at *Times Square Pulpit Series*. World Challenge, Inc 2005

¹⁰⁹ Charles H Kraft. *Confronting Powerless Christianity* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Chosen Books, 2002), 37

and is universally recognized by all true Fundamental/evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, all aspects of this trifold pronouncement of alones are under attack today within evangelical circles.¹¹⁰

2.2.5 Meeting needs

Needs in the Western church setting are often met through the one-stop church. For example, the social needs are met through coffee shops within the actual church building and mothers' groups to motivate and encourage one another. It appears that the Western church needs to cater for a 'social ministry' instead of bringing the Good News. Rick Warren sums up this suggestion when he says: "Relationships are the glue that keeps the faithful coming."¹¹¹ Gilley suggests that modern man expects his needs to be met in the church. He says: "From psychology, Strobel and the seeker-sensitive church have discovered that both baby boomers and busters have learned to expect that their needs should be met.... The result is a generation of young adults who want and expect everything right away."¹¹²

It could be suggested that in catering for the social side only, the church misses its primary function, to bring God's Word to a hurting world in order to CHANGE the life of that person. There is only one foundation on which the church may be built – Jesus, as referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:11.¹¹³ In the light of the above, we see that Rick Warren has built up a church of several thousand members by catering for the social needs of the people and keeping the so-called back door of the church closed

¹¹⁰ Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 119

¹¹¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995), 123

¹¹² Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market*, 70

¹¹³ This verse describes Christ as the only foundation of the church. Christ is also referred to as the chief cornerstone. See Luke 21:42, Matthew 12:10, Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:6 and 7.

so that people do not easily leave because they are kept busy and feel wanted and needed in the church.¹¹⁴

One need question whether this church is reaching out to the unsaved and making a difference – is this truly the Great Commission as Jesus suggested? Are the lives really changed (or are they kept busy)? Does the growth of the church result in maturation of the individual Christian within the church? How passionate are the members for Jesus and to see His Word brought to the entire world? Do they only have passion to see their church grow, and by default, the visible church community on earth? Why would Rick Warren want to keep the ‘back door’ closed – maybe that is the door mature Christians should be leaving through to spread the Gospel to the world around them. These are the questions we need to be asking to see how the Western church understands church and church growth. It needs to be considered why the Great Commission has not been completed in spite of a church that appears to be rich in resources and people power in these so-called mega churches. Church, in some cases, tries to become a multipurpose operation. This is essentially the building up of the visible church. Paul Hattaway said that, “Nowhere in God’s word does it say that if we lift up our church or methods or doctrine, the Holy Spirit will bless us and bring revival.”¹¹⁵

Gilley remarks that Warren suggests, “...most conflict is rooted in unmet needs.”¹¹⁶

Gilley also mentions that Robert Schuller apparently said, “...find out what would impress the unchurched in your community [then give it to them].” Gilley continues

¹¹⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995), 327

¹¹⁵ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 129

¹¹⁶ Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church Stayed Home* (US: New York, Evangelical Press, 2006), 91

his critique of Schuller when he suggests that in Schuller's book, *Self Esteem: The New Reformation*, he called for a radical shift in the church's focus from God to human needs. Gilley believes that Schuller is the "architect of the 'user-friendly' church." Gilley has suggested that Warren has been critical of Schuller's methods, but has inadvertently used a similar method to promote church growth.¹¹⁷

Althorp explains that the "The church has succumbed on a large scale to the deceptive schemes of the devil. Trying to meet people's needs by focusing upon them rather than the Lord...Our priority is to worship and serve God."¹¹⁸ Althorp believes that the desire of the church to meet needs is at the cost of serving God and having a relationship with Him. Althorp suggests this method is rooted in humanistic psychology. Gilley agrees with Althorp's viewpoint. Gilley said "...we do not come to Christ because we have a sense of lack or purpose, but because God has opened our eyes to our need for forgiveness of sin and relationship with Him." Gilley explains further that one of the "fatal flaws in the market-drive church's message in which the unbeliever is called to follow Jesus in order to receive a number of benefits..." We can see from the above suggestions that a church that meets needs only, will need to be on guard against a 'watered-down' Gospel.¹¹⁹

2.2.6 Performance and power

David Orton suggests that the twin virus of performance and power has spread into the church from the world: "The route to power in the corporate world is determined by achieving a set of performance criteria. Consequently, with the

¹¹⁷ Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (US: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 61

¹¹⁸ Gary Althorp, *The Devil's Playground: The Church*. 2nd Ed. (Singapore, Kings Publications, 1997), 24

¹¹⁹ Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church stayed Home* (US: New York, Evangelical Press, 2006), 90-91

contemporary corporatisation of the church, all its activity is geared toward performance.”¹²⁰

Unfortunately, the west has been guilty of chasing after power and performance. As soon as a church appears to be successful in the west, such as by gaining members, CD's are released to suggest to other churches the methods to be used to gain success. CD's and books are big sellers in the Western world as churches try to achieve similar success, even to the point of becoming part of that church body under the so-called cover scheme. Churches in the west feel that they need to belong somewhere if they are not within the recognized traditional church body. Orton suggests that in the Western church's quest for power and influence, they adopt the name of the successful church and become part of that network. Once again, it is really going back to denominationalism, but just under a different name. If a church in the West can put on a good performance, especially as regards large conferences, it generates more influence over a greater number of Christians and brings them under the influence of that particular brand of Christianity.¹²¹

Somewhere the fact that Jesus left us no blueprint of how a church should function seems to be lost in the business of performance and power of the Western church.

Ted S. Rendall said,

Perhaps the greatest barrier to revival on a large scale is the fact that we are too interested in a great display. We want an exhibition; God is looking for a man who will throw himself entirely on God. Whenever self-effort, self-glory,

¹²⁰ David Orton, *Snakes in the Temple* (England: Kent, Sovereign World Ltd, 2004), 34

¹²¹ David Orton, *Snakes in the Temple* (England: Kent, Sovereign world, 2004), 86-89

or self-seeking or self-promotion enters into the work of revival, then God leaves us to ourselves.¹²²

Jesus suggested in Matthew 28 that we ‘...go out and make disciples...’ - not call people in to our brand of Christianity. I believe that the Western church has lost sight of the greatest order Jesus gave – to reach out and become a wall-less group of passion-filled Christians who are driven by a strong desire to see people converted and lives changed forever. Moreover, this should not cost anything except a change of life.

2.2.7 Fragmented body

It can be said that the body of the church is fragmented. Orton suggests that restoration of relationship is a key to rebuilding the church.¹²³ We are all called to spread the Gospel but the Western outlook expects a trained evangelist or career Christian to do this. This causes fragmentation of the body into roles and offices.

Paul Hattaway suggests that a missionary should be someone who loves Jesus and is passionate to reach the lost world for Him. Surely all Christians should be missionaries.¹²⁴ Keith Green said, “This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of souls on the earth!”¹²⁵ From Green’s comment we can deduce that every person is personally called to bring the Gospel to those around them.

¹²² Ted Randall, *More Great Quotes*,
<http://www.sermonIndex.net> (accessed 12 May 2006)

¹²³ David Orton, *Snakes in the Temple* (England: Kent, Sovereign World, 2004), 211

¹²⁴ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 125

¹²⁵ Keith Green, *More Great Quotes*,
<http://www.sermonIndex.net> (accessed 27 October 2007)

When we compare the passion the first disciples and apostles had to spread the Gospel across the whole face of the earth, we should feel ashamed that most Western Christians do not feel responsible for those outside of their church circle. I believe this fragmentation seen in the Western church is one of the causes of the ineffectiveness of the church. Griffith John states:

The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual unity! He is the Fount of true joy! We as missionaries need the fullness of this joy. Without it our work will be a burden to us, and we shall toil on with the hearts of slaves; and the hearts of slaves are never strong.¹²⁶

The Western church is rich and has great assets, probably the most assets in the history of the church, yet it is fragmented and not effective in reaching the lost. As Griffith John has stated, the Holy Spirit needs to be present. In striving for performance and size, one must question whether the church has left out the Holy Spirit along the way, causing the congregation to become slaves to the local church instead of being missionaries in the garden of God. Do we agonize over lost souls? I refer to the comment made by James A. Stewart when he said, "Revival is the people of God agonizing on behalf of lost souls going to hell."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Griffith John, *More Great Quotes*.
<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (no date found)

¹²⁷ James A. Stewart, *More Great Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndex.net>(no date found)

2.2.8 Connection or community?

Frank Damazio suggests “A connection to God makes connecting to people a true possibility.”¹²⁸ Damazio’s suggestion is that we need to get back to seeing our relationship with God as a fundamental building block in our relationships with others, especially within the Christian body. Many people in the local church are disheartened by the lack of care and relationship in church, especially in large congregations. The modern trend to leave the local church and become the ‘church’ has started to happen. This could lead to heretical teaching because Western churchgoers have not been taken through a discipleship stage in the first place. In other words, the lack of community in churches has led to a neglect of discipleship. Conferences and year planners have left little space for the move of the Holy Spirit. Churches are almost expected to show a plan for the coming year, as most businesses would. Ministers are encouraged to run the church as a business because they are often dealing with huge financial figures and the congregation will hold the leaders account-able. Barrett and Johnson found the following figures:

US Christians control trillions in assets, while at any given time 200,000,000 Brothers and Sisters starve. 78 countries each have Great Commission Christians whose personal income exceeds US\$1 billion a year. Emboldened by lax procedures, trusted church treasurers are embezzling from the Church

¹²⁸ Frank Damazio, *The Gate Church* (U.S.A: Portland, City Bible Publishing, 2002), 68

\$5,500,000 per day. That is \$16 Billion per year. The total Christian spending on foreign missions is only \$15 Billion.¹²⁹

In the light of this, it needs to be considered whether there is any connection or community if the church is spending such large sums of money on themselves and so little on outreach. 'Outreach' does not just imply international missions, but also outreach into local communities to bring in the lost sheep. Griffith John said:

...it is the Holy Ghost in us that is everything, and the Father is willing to bestow Him upon the weakest if he will only ask in the spirit of implicit faith and entire self-surrender. My cry these days is for a Pentecost, first on myself and my missionary brethren, and then on the native Church, and then on the heathen at large.¹³⁰

In the light of the above statement, if we have the Holy Spirit to help us reach out, do we need all that money in the church? It reminds us again that the Asian church is the poorest church in the world, but the richest in outreach and numbers.

2.2.9 A move of the Holy Spirit or a move of man?

The Western church is also most likely to go where they think the move of the Spirit is taking place. This has led to a tendency of the Westerner to change membership to another church several times during their lifetime. Hattaway suggests this as a major difference between the Western and Asian church. The Western church runs after signs and wonders, when the Bible states in Mark 16 verse 15 to 18 that signs

¹²⁹ Barrett and Johnson Table 1-1 in *World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001),8

¹³⁰ Griffith John, *More Great Quotes*.
<http://www.sermonIndex.net> (accessed 28 May 2008).

and wonders follow those who preach the Word.¹³¹ One instance of this in the church was the Todd Bentley so-called revival in Lakeland Florida. People flocked from all over the United States and elsewhere to his meetings to ‘catch the fire’. False angel encounters were encouraged and third heaven guided visualizations. Meanwhile, the Western church is dying of a lack of knowledge of basic Biblical principles.¹³² In fact, many in the West could even be classified as Biblically illiterate and unfortunately easily lead astray.

The worldly models of leadership in the West are also a cause for concern. Somebody who is well spoken, has some sort of vision, works well with others, has a good gift of administration and financial ‘know how’ would most likely be the leader. Often this leadership role is accompanied by the title of Senior Pastor or in some cases the CEO of the large business enterprise called church. The West has a number of career ministries resulting in a particular brand of ministry – usually by that person’s name. This generates large amounts of revenue as people buy CD’s DVDs, books and videos to satisfy a growing need to be fed. 90% of all Christian materials are in English, but only 8% of the world speaks English. 91% of Christian outreach-evangelism does not target non-Christians but targets other Christians in already-evangelised countries or people-groups.¹³³

¹³¹ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 123

¹³² Various reports on Todd Bentley may be found on prophetic@revivalschool.com

¹³³ Barret and Johnson *Table 1-1 in World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001), 81

2.2.10 Entrepreneurial spirit or Holy Spirit?

In keeping with the aforementioned statistics, the entrepreneurial spirit is prominent within certain sectors of the church where Bible based theology has been replaced. The explosion of Christian literature has led believers to read extensively. This, in itself, may be an advantage, but in some cases it is at the cost of losing sight of the actual 'Good News' and the fact that Jesus wants His church to reach out to the lost. Paul Hattaway has an objective view on the Western church because he is a Westerner but he works in the Asian church. He has seen the growth within the Asian church and is best able to compare the two. His comment brings home the entrepreneurial spirit in the West, where the church and its people are continually built up, but the church does not reach out. His view brings the sad truth of the Western church to light in the following comment. He says:

God cannot use a person who wants a safe and comfortable Christian life. If your only aim in life is to get yourself to heaven, then you are not likely to take many other people with you. Many Christians have somehow become deceived into spiritual selfishness, gorging themselves on the latest Christian teaching, books, seminars, music and fads...spend all our time edifying ourselves... not seeking to win the souls of lost humanity...¹³⁴

Prosperity is preached and taught in the literature, a great attraction to so many.

David Wilkerson said in a sermon:

¹³⁴ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 153

Show me a preacher who never exposes sin – who doesn't show people the difference between the holy and the profane, who doesn't mention repentance or judgment, but instead says God wants to make you rich and prosperous – and I'll call such a man what he is. He is a wolf. And he has substituted the Cross for cash.¹³⁵

It seems that instead of the church going out into the world to preach the Gospel and bring people into the 'fold' by God's love, the church instead thinks that it must meet the needs of various people and hope that in the process they hear about Jesus. Bob Buford mentions "The Church of the 21st Century is reforming itself into a multi-faceted service operation."¹³⁶ It appears as if the Western church thinks that in offering a multi-faceted service, it is more successful than a church that merely preaches the Gospel. In other words, the success of a church and church growth is measured by the number of services rendered, the size of the building and the number of attendants. If the church is able to offer services throughout the week, it is considered the most successful, in spite of these services rendered not always being solely bringing the Gospel to people. The service in the week could be a young mothers gathering, tea for the elderly, dinners for stressed-out businessmen or a youth gathering in which games are played; the Gospel is not necessarily mentioned in any of these meetings. Gilley rightly says that the church has become man-centred instead of Christ-centred.

He says:

¹³⁵ David Wilkerson, "Guarding the Sheep" sermon delivered 15 November 2004, Times Square Pulpit Series: world Challenge, Inc (2004), 2

¹³⁶ Robert E. Klenck, *How Diaprax Manifests Itself in the Church*, <http://www.crossroads.to/New/Church/Klenck3.html> (accessed 4 February 2006).

The old gospel is about God; the new gospel is about us. The old gospel is about sin; the new gospel is about needs. The old gospel is about our need for righteousness; the new gospel is about our need for fulfilment. The old gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing; the new gospel is attractive. Many are flocking to the new gospel but it is altogether questionable how many are actually being saved.¹³⁷

2.2.11 Counter-culture or sub-culture?

Orton has seen this non-threatening church culture in the churches of the West. He comments, "...instead of living as a kingdom counter-culture we have become another Western sub-culture, trapped in our Evangelical and Pentecostal ghettos of cultural irrelevance."¹³⁸ I believe that Orton sees that the Western church is afraid to offend people in case they do not come back to church again. The Gospel is offensive; it forces us to change. John MacArthur (cited in Gilley) aptly puts it that, "Nothing in Scripture indicates the church should lure people to Christ by presenting Christianity as an attractive option..."¹³⁹

In considering the above statements, we detect dissatisfaction in the Western church. The Western church realises that it is ineffective and tries to cater for the needs of the people around it, in the hope that it will become relevant in the area in which it finds itself. However, in the process, the church is influenced by the world, instead of the church influencing the world. Rev Peter Smith, Anglican rector in Perth says that if traditional churches are going to attract young people back into the

¹³⁷ Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 74

¹³⁸ David Orton, *Snakes in the Temple* (England: Kent, Sovereign World Ltd, 2004), 153

¹³⁹ Gary Gilley, *This Little church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 75

pews they need to get back to the Bible first. He believes the Anglicans have rejected essential Christian Bible belief while trying to be contemporary.¹⁴⁰

It must be pointed out that some more traditional churches in the West do not necessarily fit into this category. They have the clergy/laity roles clearly demarcated. Most of the church members do not have an active role; however, we do see humility and reliance on God. We see a reverence for God that may often be absent in some charismatic/Pentecostal churches. However, some traditional churches have compromised the Gospel in order to meet the demands of the popular vote. They may not have expanded their church to reach out during the week to various popular 'clubs' and gatherings to keep people busy, but they have buckled under the pressure of society to ordain homosexuals (such as the Anglican Church). In spite of thinking that they will attract more church members, they have not had significant growth as seen with Rev Smith. In fact, the opposite has happened where members have left because they know it is counter-Gospel.

The traditional Western church, I believe, has the biggest challenge to attract new members. I believe the church may need to return to the foundation of intimacy with God and Gospel-based preaching, where people are convicted and walk out the church on a Sunday knowing that the passion they feel for the lost has come from a Holy Spirit encounter. This passion to save the lost should permeate into their lives in the week so that people come to church to be converted and not amused. This is why we need to look at the growing Asian church and learn from it.

¹⁴⁰ Rev Peter Smith in an interview by Belle Taylor, "New Believers" *West Weekend Magazine*, 17 October 2009.

2.2.12 Seeker-sensitive

David Wilkerson suggests the 1980's seemed to be the so-called "Decade of Harvest" from which the so-called 'seeker-sensitive' church movement grew.¹⁴¹ This movement is characterised by the mega-churches. However, in general, in the West these mega-churches have become large corporate concerns where the latest technology, corporate thinking and para-church functions are held, where para-church refers to human needs that are not strictly gospel. These needs could be job seeking or buying the latest Christian literature. Other needs are also met – such as coffee shops all under the one roof of the church. It appears that the more needs are catered for, the higher the church membership. In a Western setting, numbers look good, attract even greater numbers and so spell 'success'.

Unfortunately, many of these members have merely been transfers from smaller churches in the area. Invariably these smaller churches have been the more traditional Western church. Belle Taylor describes the popular charismatic Perth church, Riverview Church as "...part multimedia presentation, part sermon and part rock concert."¹⁴² If an outsider describes a church in these terms, one wonders how far the Western church may have compromised in some instances.

Additionally, the church is now focusing on the needs of unbelievers. This phenomenon has been taken from Rick Warren's Saddleback Valley Community Church where a survey was taken to find out the needs of the people who lived in the area where Rick Warren planned to start a church. The church was then

¹⁴¹ David Wilkerson, *Its Harvest Time*, <http://www.worldchallenge.org/> (accessed 12 November 2005)

¹⁴² Belle Taylor, "New Believers," *West Weekend Magazine*, 17 October, 2009, 10

designed to cater for these needs. Biblically speaking, the church was designed to equip the saints, and not to meet the needs and desires of unbelievers. Warren took this concept a step further, when he designed a circular diagram featuring the function of Saddleback Church. He tried to avoid the hierarchical, traditional approach to church, that is, with the clergy at the top, in charge, going down to the laity below. Ministry is the core/centre of Warren's design, but in the process, but it seems that he has almost effectively left God out of his diagram.¹⁴³ The self-fulfilment of the seeker-sensitive church has blossomed into entertainment. In fact, the church has taken on the image of the society it finds itself in. Bloesch (as cited in Gilley) suggests that people do not attend church to be loyal or because they are obligated, but rather because it meets their needs.¹⁴⁴

2.2.13 Clergy and laity

The church is a body made up of many members with different tasks; 1 Corinthians 12:12 is clear on this aspect. Many Western Christians feel that they are not adequately trained to preach the Gospel in the work place or in social situations other than the church. It is a clear indication that the general Western Christian has not been disciplined to bring the Word to others in a confident way. One needs to look at the reason for the trend to depend on trained clergy to spread the Word. It is quite clear that the Great Commission of Mark 16 and Matthew 28 is a call to all Christians.

¹⁴³ Cf. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995), 205

¹⁴⁴ Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: New York, Evangelical Press, 2005), 78
Read more about seeker sensitive churches in Donald G. Bloesch, 'Whatever Happened to God?' in *Christianity Today*, 5 February, 2001 page 55

It appears as if the Western church is confused in the role of the church members within the body of Christ. This fact is further highlighted by the comment from James A Stewart “Revival is the recognition of the ministry of insignificant members of the body, and deliverance from idol worship of the more prominent members who are in the limelight.”¹⁴⁵ In its desire to attract more members and to please people, it can be said that the Western church has lost sight of many Biblical truths. The power of God Almighty has taken a back seat to human programs, so denying the ability of Father God to draw people in through the conviction of His Holy Spirit. Charles Crismier has called for the church to get back to hospitality in the pursuit of restoring the relationships within the church. In other words, in order to reconcile the church members, everyone needs to feel that they have a role within the greater body of Christ. He calls for restoration of community where religion should be replaced by relationship.¹⁴⁶

2.2.14 Humility and servant-hood

David Orton feels that the church needs to get back to the servant nature that Jesus demonstrated here on earth. He says, “Brokenness on earth will always create openness in heaven.”¹⁴⁷ He continues, “Therefore the church’s recovery will be in the opposite spirit – in the spirit of humility.”¹⁴⁸ I believe that Orton has pinpointed a problem, the lack of humility. We need to ask ourselves why there is a lack of humility in the Western church. Could it be because Westerners like to be in control

¹⁴⁵ James A. Stewart, *More Great Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (nd)

¹⁴⁶ Charles Crismier, *Counterfeit Community*,
http://www.saveus.org/articles/counterfeit_community.htm (accessed 3 November 2007)

¹⁴⁷ David Orton, *Snakes in the Temple* (England: Kent, Sovereign World Ltd, 2004), 204

¹⁴⁸ Orton, *Snakes in the Temple*, 205

of their own destiny and so they cannot 'hand-over' so to speak to God? Is this why the conversion process is aborted in many Christians? Is this why Western Christians are not maturing? Is this a factor in reaching out to others? It is humiliating to admit that we are sinners saved by the grace of God. Successful testimony shows the road from sin to salvation when we speak to unbelievers. Where does humility start? Could it start with the individual within the church? If this is so, where do they have a role model of humility and humble service to God? Our model is in Jesus, but what message is the average mega-church senior minister/CEO sending out? Do we need to be 'purpose driven' as Rick Warren stated. We need Christ and to see Him glorified. This must come through humble commitment and service to God. When we serve we are taking the message of the Gospel out into the world – the Great Commission. Could it be that the Great Commission can only be completed when the church bows in humility to its Saviour, Master and King?

2.2.15 Summary on the Western church

In summary we can say that the Western church appears to be confined into a certain buildings where needs are met ranging from social to Gospel. The church may spend far more on itself financially and often little on mission and outreach. Numbers present in services are important to the Western church, because this will indicate their success or lack of it. Membership is more important than discipleship and most Western Christians are not comfortable with spreading the Gospel outside of the church environment. The latest Christian publishing is often used in the church as much as the Bible or even more often in some cases. Obedience and commitment are unpopular preaching topics. Commitment is not long term to any

church and Christians move easily between churches when they think the Holy Spirit is starting a new wave elsewhere.

In this way the body of Christ has become increasingly fragmented. Most church decisions are taken by popular vote and prayer services are less popular. The Western church tries to prove its success with the performance it can put on, instead of the power it can gain through spending time in the presence of God. The Western church has tried to appease the political and social pressure of the day by trying to become relevant to the culture, instead of being the counter-culture it is called to be. The salvation moment is stressed at the cost of the conversion journey. This may lead to stunted growth by individual members of the church. Maybe the humility that conversion brings has been lost on the Western church. Often Biblical knowledge is lacking in the average Western Christian that may result directly in Christians feeling inadequately trained to spread the Gospel outside the walls of the church. Many Western Christians have never been through a time of discipleship, resulting in their lack of conviction on the Great Commission.

The Asian church understands the concept of church differently from the Western church. We can look at a few of the known aspects that are different. The idea is that this thesis will bring many more differences to light. Could these differences have an impact on a church to such an extent that it becomes wall-less and inspired to complete the Great Commission?

2.3 *The Asian church*

The Asian church sees itself as the church, wherever its members may meet. They do not understand the concept of 'going to church'.¹⁴⁹ When they leave the meeting, they still understand that they are the church on the move. They do not invite people to church, but they bring the Gospel to the unbelievers in whatever setting they may find themselves. The Asian does not view the pastor as the career minister, but all take responsibility for sharing the Gospel. They take Matthew 5:14 seriously by stressing that they are the light to the world once they know Jesus. They anticipate that through the Holy Spirit they will make a difference to the lives around them.

This is a refreshing complete trust and faith in God to make the difference – and not a church putting on a performance to attract people and not offend them. The Asian church seldom builds church buildings – but according to the New Testament example. They meet in houses and take communion and share and witness about Christ. Hattaway suggests that the home churches have been stripped of all non-essentials that most Westerners would associate with church.¹⁵⁰ Brother Yun explains that the reason the West does not see revival is because it sees church as a building and Jesus as a historical figure. Yun aptly says:

¹⁴⁹ Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man* (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 278.

Here Brother Yun explains that the Chinese realise that the Holy Land is connected to China by road for thousands of years. It is known as the Silk Road. Nations along the Silk Road are the most un-evangelised on earth and fall within the 10/40 window of nations. These nations are targeted as mission fields by the house churches of China. The missionaries walk from one village to another in order to bring the Gospel to the non-believers. In other words, the church is wall-less as it takes the Gospel back to Jerusalem and so completing the Great Commission.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 18

When I'm in the West I see all the mighty church buildings and all the expensive equipment, plush carpets and state-of-the-art sound systems. I can assure the Western church with absolute certainty that you don't need any more church buildings. Church buildings will never bring the revival you seek. The pursuit of more possessions will never bring revival. Jesus truly stated, 'A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' Luke 12:15.¹⁵¹

According to Paul Hattaway, "Church is meant to be a training centre and command hub for war not a social club for pleasantries and hypocrisy, where people give lip service to Christ while refusing to obey his commands."¹⁵² In other words, the church does not have walls, but is a living organism, flowing outward from its meeting place. Brother Yun has suggested the following, "Just because you have a church building doesn't necessarily mean Jesus is with you."¹⁵³ Could the previous comment from Brother Yun mean that the church is perceived to be more powerful when believers move into the world and bring the love of Jesus into a situation? Christ's tangible presence may be felt more heavily there in a situation of need, than in a particular building set aside for worship.

¹⁵¹ Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man* (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 296

¹⁵² Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem*, 156

¹⁵³ Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 298

2.3.1 Serving God or church?

The Asian church believes that the church should equip the saints for serving Jesus.

The perception of serving a church, that is, a local body is not found here.¹⁵⁴ Jesus is 'seen' as a Person – and this result of 'seeing' Jesus makes them see themselves as the living extension of Christ, reaching out to serve others and to equip them to serve Christ in turn. Therefore, the body of Christ is seen as an expression of Christ. David Wang referred to this 'seeing' Jesus in his interview that they see Christ actually being with them.¹⁵⁵ Jesus is seen in a personal and current way and not in a historical sense. This makes God very relevant in their experience of Him and the reality of Jesus. The Asian believers often referred directly to Jesus having healed them in a first hand manner.

The building-up of the invisible church is seen as outreach of Christians to those who do not yet know *The Way*.¹⁵⁶ They gather together to hear the Word, and disperse to preach and teach it to the un-reached. They believe that the church is to reach into the education system, the government, sport, music and market place. The Word will permeate throughout society and so they are a witness in their world.

¹⁵⁴ Brother Yun, *Living Water* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 203

¹⁵⁵ David Wang, "Asia's Maturing Church," interviewed by Asia Report, March/April 1992. *Renewal Journal* #2 (1993):4146 (cited on <http://www.renewaljournal.com/>)

Dr Wang is the International Director of Asian Outreach. For more information on Asian Church Growth see - <http://www.pastornet.net.au/renewal/journal2wang.html>.

¹⁵⁶ The Way is a term used in the Asian church to refer to the walk the Christian takes from the first steps of salvation, through conversion and on into maturity in Christ. It is Christ's way without compromise i.e.: The Way of the Cross. See also Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (UK: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 215

2.3.2 Personal experience of Jesus

I believe that this personal experience of Jesus is one of the keys to understanding how the Asians personally experience Christianity. They feel as though they are the disciples of Jesus –going out to make a difference because they take the Great Commission seriously. They realise that if they do not bring the Gospel to the present generation, then they have failed Jesus and been disobedient to His order. They feel personally involved because they realise that a chance gone amiss to share the Gospel, may be a chance gone forever – even into eternity. They see church as a journey of giving all to God for His glory. Jesus is their first love – and they love talking about Him. The concept of ‘giving all’ is seen strongly in Asia. Brother Yun states:

When revival came to believers in China, the result was thousands of evangelists being sent out to all corners of the nation, carrying fire from the altar of God with them. When God moves in the West, it seems you want to stop and enjoy His presence and blessings too long, and build an altar to your experiences.¹⁵⁷

2.3.3 Submission

Hattaway suggests that in the Chinese House churches God is revered and feared – therefore worship of God plays a major role in any meeting. These meetings may be small home groups or the celebration service where a larger number of people meet. Submission to the Lordship of Christ changes how the body of Christ is perceived.

¹⁵⁷ Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 296

The church is under one head, Jesus. Reverence for the Holy Spirit is the 'driving force' or power to move the body of Christ to greater things every day. The church is seen as a gathering of believers who are there to worship God Almighty as their Sovereign. All believers are brothers in Christ who have respect for the elders (those more mature in Christ). Their main purpose is to bring the salvation message to others and in some cases, to prepare them for persecution or even martyrdom.¹⁵⁸

According to Hattaway, "Every house church pastor in China is ready to lay down his life for the gospel. When we live this way, we'll see God do great things by his grace."¹⁵⁹ This persecution can be understood in the light of an article, stating that Pastor Allen Yuan, one of the founders of the underground church movement in China, had two criteria for ordination of a Christian worker. They should have suffered for Christ and should have started a church within a year of their own conversion.¹⁶⁰ The church will always start with the help of other converts. In other words, ordination is not a formality as it often is in the Western world.

In the light of the above statements, we can see that submission works in two ways – firstly, submission to God for His will to be done, and then He will grow the church in His way; secondly, the need to show respect and submission to the elders of the church where they meet for worship and training. The elders have invariably earned

¹⁵⁸ Paul Hattaway et al. *Back to Jerusalem* (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), x-xiv

¹⁵⁹ Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man* (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 300

¹⁶⁰ Gloryofhiscross-subscribe@MyInJesus.com (accessed 7 October 2005)

Pastor Allen Yuan pastored with Watchman Nee and Wang Ming Dao and refused to join the Three Self Patriotic Movement when communism began in 1949. He served 22 years in prison and was only set free when China changed their policy. In 1980 he started home church meetings and baptised over 1000 people per week. He is known as the founder of the underground church in China. For more information, this website discusses the latest developments in the persecuted church of Asia.

For more information on Allen Yuan's life, read the article by Dr PP Job at <http://www.drjobsmision.com>

the respect of the believers because they have suffered for their faith. It is interesting to note that in Asia, every pastor has a spiritual father, not an overhead committee to whom he is answerable. This arrangement could come from the initial discipleship of the new Christian. The Word speaks about submission.

Yun suggests all Christians need discipline in prayer, Scripture reading and submission to His will.¹⁶¹ Preaching on submission is not popular in the West, but could be the difference between life and death in the Asian church. When the Asians submit to God and the elders, they learn to submit to authority when they are persecuted. This has often caught the Chinese authorities off-guard because they are not expecting this. Usually people caught by the authorities put up a fight, but Christians go quietly, knowing their Christian family is praying for them. They also see imprisonment as an opportunity to preach the Gospel in the prison.¹⁶²

Hattaway explains that the Chinese believer is taught to reach others of a different culture and also how to receive training in cross-cultural communication. They are also taught how to reach specific groups such as Buddhist people. They are even taught how to suffer and die for the Lord. They know how to witness in any circumstance, such as in prison or in passing others in the street and also how to escape from imprisonment.¹⁶³ Could this aspect of submission be another key in understanding the Asian church? They are fully submitted to God and see their pastor as a holy man because he has proved himself to be so. Maybe the lack of

¹⁶¹ Brother Yun, *Living Water* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 207

¹⁶² Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), xiii.

Here Hattaway quotes the words that bring comfort to the suffering Chinese Christian found in 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness..." Hattaway adds further that the house churches believe they are purified by suffering. See page 19 for further details.

¹⁶³ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 98 and 99.

submission in the Western church has led to the fragmented church we see – where everyone forms his own brand of Christianity because he does not want to be part of a greater more traditional church. Could this be another factor that makes a difference between the growing Asian church and the Western church? This would lead to the mentality of building up the visible church in the West as opposed to building the Kingdom of God as seen in the Asian church.

2.3.4 Repentance

Asian churches stress that there can be no power without there first being repentance. Without repentance the church cannot hear God because God will not build on the wrong foundations.¹⁶⁴ Repentance is not merely understood as the *sinner's prayer*, but rather, the daily dying to oneself and crying out to Jesus for His will to be done.¹⁶⁵

Based on Yun's *Living Water* and Hattaway's *Back to Jerusalem*, the Asians believe that when repentance has taken place, the foundation is laid for conversion and discipleship. It is a journey and not an event. They believe that when proper conversion has taken place, that is, the person desires for their life to change so that they serve Jesus only, then a hunger to learn the Word will be a natural progression. New converts are avid students of the Word. The lack of Bibles in many areas makes a Bible a prized possession.¹⁶⁶ Bibles are often written out by hand in small exercise

¹⁶⁴ Brother Yun. Paul Hattaway, ed. *Living Water* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zonervan, 2008), 15-21

¹⁶⁵ Sinner' Prayer is a name given for a prayer of repentance. This prayer is usually said at the time of committing one's life to the Lord. Often the sinner's prayer is said corporately at an altar call. An altar call is an occasion where the pastor invites people to come forward and make a decision to follow Jesus. The sinner's prayer also includes inviting Jesus to indwell that person. See a previous footnote suggesting that the 'Sinner's Prayer' has no Biblical foundation.

¹⁶⁶ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, ed. *Living Water* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 289

books. They realise that in prison, they have no access to the written Word, so they memorise it for those times. Repentance means a changed life and a changed life is good ground to plant the Word. This is a Biblical concept that Jesus stressed during His prayer to His Father in John 17. Jesus saw repentance as ongoing in order to cleanse the sinner for greater works. Jesus said “Sanctify them by Your truth, Your Word is truth.”

2.3.5 God’s Word

According to Brother Yun, “I had a desire for God’s presence and power, and now I realized how important it is to know God’s written Word.”¹⁶⁷ Yun has described this as a defining moment in his life. This is typical of many Asian Christians. This makes one wonder about the many Christian books sold in the West. The most popular authors sell many books and people are drawn away from God’s Word to follow man’s word. Could this be another factor in the lack of growth in the Western church? Do Christian books water down the passion God gives in His book?

The Asian believes as the Bible says – that signs and wonders will follow the preaching of the Word. Lambert suggests that at root, whether house church or Three-Self Patriotic Church, the church is firmly Biblical.¹⁶⁸ The Asian church believes that signs and wonders are a natural occurrence when the Good News is preached.¹⁶⁹ This makes one wonder about the craze that occurred in the West where people rushed to Florida to ‘catch the fire’ that Todd Bentley believed he was giving to those who attended his meetings. Here we see a typical example of the

¹⁶⁷ Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 34

¹⁶⁸ Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* ((Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch, 2006), 22

¹⁶⁹ Paul Hattaway et al. *Back to Jerusalem* (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 123

West running after signs and wonders instead of studying God's powerful Word and expecting miracles. Lambert warned against unbiblical overemphasis on healing, in the West, compared to Asia's "...authentic Gospel of repentance and denunciation of sin..."¹⁷⁰

2.3.6 Avid study of the Word and discipleship

It is a known that the avid study of God's Word and its application in life opens doors to disciple new converts. Christians studying God's word and carrying out His orders are blessed with His presence and signs and wonders begin to occur. The Asian church stresses discipleship. Equipping classes teach the new converts the basics of Christianity.¹⁷¹ Thereafter they are disciplined or taught through practical experience based on Jesus' teaching, by more mature Christians. This concept has been taken from Jesus' own ministry, where He taught on a practical level. Discipleship is seen as the training of individuals to join an army for Jesus. This army is not waiting for the end times, but is actively bringing the Gospel to all areas of Asia, in effect; it is a church without walls. According to Brother Yun:

We travelled across China, training churches to send their workers out as pioneer evangelists and missionaries. We encouraged each place to start training centres. The vision for training spread quickly as they saw what tremendous growth is brought to the work of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 214

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 136-140

¹⁷² Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: London & grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 224

In the light of this statement we may say that Jesus knew best how to spread the Good News – through discipleship. The Western church keeps suggesting that they have gone back to the New Testament way of church – but why have they forgotten the most important factor, discipleship. As we have seen by Brother Yun’s experience, discipleship activates church growth.

In Paul Hattaway’s interview with a persecuted Christian in China, the persecuted Christian said,

Our idea was that we should train first-generation Christians to reach second-generation people, with the hope that the third generation would be strong and ready to take the Gospel all over China. BUT even the brand new believers were going out for the Lord and seeing great miracles happen in their ministries!¹⁷³

This shows that every believer is encouraged and trained to go out and bring the Gospel to the lost. It is not considered the pastor’s duty. Christianity is a way of life and an expression of Jesus.

2.3.7 Prayer and pray-ers

A characteristic of the Asian church is their powerful prayer groups who meet daily. These are the invisible leaders of the church. They offer the intercessory prayer on behalf of those who carry out God’s orders/plans. No decision is made without the input of the intercessors, because they have spent a large part of their time in the

¹⁷³ Paul Hattaway, *Asia Harvest Report* of April 2003 (Thailand: Chiang Mai 50101). (accessed 25 May 2003) Find more information at www.asiaharvest.org

presence of the Living God. These intercessors are not visibly involved in the daily running of the so-called visible church. The 'pray-ers' are seen as the powerhouse of the church. They are invisible to the authorities and report to the rest of the body when brothers or sisters are jailed. Intercessors are seen as vital to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ. The Asian revival is saturated in prayer. They suggest that Jesus is their example of an intercessor. Based on Jesus example of sitting away from the crowd to pray, *prayer mountains* are set up where believers meet in disciplined devotion.¹⁷⁴ Jesus also made it known to His disciples that He does nothing except that which He knows is His Father's will. John refers to Christ doing the Father's will only in John 4:34. Jesus could not know His Father's will unless He spent time in prayer with the Father. Jesus taught praying and intercession. It is His example to us, so we should follow.

It appears the Western church concentrates less on prayer and more on the music ministry. Is it because the crowds are drawn in by music and performance and less so by prayer? Once again we see numbers matter in the Western church, but power of God matters in the Asian church. God's power is not evident in a church where mankind follows its ideas. Mankind needs to follow God – but how do they know where God wants them when they spend so little time in His presence? Jesus said in John 15:15-17

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his masters business. Instead, I call you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, I chose you and

¹⁷⁴ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain, Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 211-213

appointed you to go and bear fruit- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name. This is my command: love each other.

We can only know our Master's business if we spend time in prayer with Him. We need to notice that Jesus said to 'go' and bear fruit. The church needs to pray and reach out and then the Father will give whatever we need.

2.3.8 Agendas and youth

In the Asian church the youth is seen as the future of the church, and so the torch carriers of the Gospel to the next generation. Care is taken to teach them God's Word. The youth do not expect to be entertained by the latest fads, hearing the Gospel can be life- threatening in some areas, for example, some youth regard prison as their seminary for training in ministry.¹⁷⁵ The youth take the Word out into all areas of their lives, and so this phenomenon results in a church of all ages, not merely older people in traditional churches, as is often the case in the west. Brother Yun was quoted by Hattaway as saying "All genuine revivals of the Lord result in believers responding with action and soul winning... it's only when we step out in obedience and share the Gospel with people that we come to know God's blessing in every area of our lives."¹⁷⁶

This quote reminds us that the Word brings action. The Bible as a written word is important for the maturing of individuals and for the church to grow and reach out to areas beyond the four walls. Notice that Brother Yun suggests that GENUINE

¹⁷⁵ David Aikman. *Jesus in Beijing* (Oxon: Abingdon, Marston Books, 2003), 133

¹⁷⁶ Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 297

revivals of the Lord results in believers impassioned to take action and spread the Gospel. House churches in Asia are made up of clusters of families suggesting that the youth are also active in lay leadership.¹⁷⁷ Youth in the West are generally confined to leadership among the youth and not the church at large. Could this be another problem with the Western church? The Western church is interested in best sellers and doing programs that has been successful in other churches. In the process, we lose sight of God's Word – the Word that inspires, impassions and changes lives.

Rick Warrens' book, *The Purpose Driven Life* is a best seller. Warren packaged it into a study program that churches could follow easily. The book ignited major changes in Warren's church, but it does not mean to say it will have the same effect across the globe. Western churches quickly jump onto the bandwagon hoping that the success the book brought into some churches will do the same in their church. It seems strange that the faith of the Western church seems to have been eroded and we prefer to rely on man rather than God to bring the increase. Only God's Word has the power to do that and this has been proved through the centuries. Could it be time for the West to turn from the programs and agendas set out by the church administration, and get back to the basic Word of God? Would a return to the basic Word of God and the discipleship of church members spur growth in the Western church, hence ushering in a growth in numbers within the church as well as growth in maturity among individuals Christians who make up the body of Christ?

¹⁷⁷ Paul Hattaway et al. *Back to Jerusalem* (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 17-19

2.3.9 Kingdom vision

The Kingdom vision has given the Asian church a 'regional' identity such as in the New Testament, because house groups meet for celebrations in regions. In the persecuted regions, only the leaders dare meet at least once a week. In 2001 it was estimated in the magazine *Tianfeng* that there were about 1100 churches that were registered with the authorities and another 5 000 meeting places in the Henan area. Sadly there are only 100 pastors for every 50 000 believers.¹⁷⁸ This regional identity was present in the New Testament church, for example: the church in Ephesus. In China the house church network is named after the region or town. The names of the churches indicate this – such as, House churches in Heilongjiang, where 37 million people live and where 1.6 to 2.5 million house church members are openly Christian.¹⁷⁹ For instance, the 'unity movement' previously known as the Sinim Fellowship, has no official name but meets as brothers in Christ. This network totals about 58 million believers.¹⁸⁰ This trend has not yet started in the West, although the West has striven for New Testament style churches for several years.¹⁸¹ The regional instead of denominational identity brings greater unity into the house church network and they all work together toward the common goal of completing the Great Commission. This could be the reason that we find unity among Asia's

¹⁷⁸ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (United Kingdom: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 250. *Tianfeng*, translated as "Heavenly Wind", is the Christian monthly magazine published by the TSPM or better known as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. They report all religious matters to the government. The above figures are only those known by this movement and not the true state of affairs. It is rumoured that figures could be as high as 400 000 members per group of house church networks. For more information, see Lambert's book.

¹⁷⁹ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, (United Kingdom: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 248

¹⁸⁰ Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 240

¹⁸¹ The West has a trend of 'out of church Christians' who are meeting in homes instead of the church. These facts are well documented in Barna's statistics.

churches in spite of the numerous dialects spoken. We can compare this to the US where 33 000 denominations are found.¹⁸²

Jesus said in John 17:20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me THROUGH THEIR MESSAGE, that ALL of THEM may be ONE, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the WORLD may BELIEVE that you have SENT ME.” (My emphasis). Christ’s last prayer on earth was a prayer for unity of all believers. We have not seen this unity in the West in the light of the above multi-denominational aspect of the Western church. In the context of this prayer one must question the message that the Western church is sending out to the dying world.

If the Western church were less fragmented and had a greater vision for Kingdom rather than church, would it make a great difference to the growth of the church?

There are several ways to define church growth; we need to look at them in order to answer this question fully.

2.4 Church growth

Church growth may be understood in different ways. Elmer Towns suggest several ways of looking at church growth as seen below:¹⁸³

i)-Internal growth – that is growth in the Word of God and spiritual maturity.

ii)-External growth – or numerical growth, such as attendance figures, membership etc.

¹⁸² Barrett and Johnson *Table 1-1 in World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001),33

¹⁸³ Gary McIntosh and Paul E. Engle, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 44-45

iii)-Biological growth – when church members themselves have children.

iv)-Conversion growth – whereby evangelism brings people to church.

v)-Transfer growth – members of other churches join a particular congregation.

vi)-Expansion growth – when a new church is planted nearby.

vii)-Extension growth – outreach that focuses on another culture or group in the community.

At this stage in the thesis, I need to make a comparison of the Western and Asian church understanding of church growth. Church growth is understood differently in the West as opposed to the Asian churches. From the above research, we are able to select some of the most obvious differences in the understanding of 'growth'.

2.4.1 Numbers a sign of success?

The Western church considers a church to be growing and successful if it has proof in numbers attending on a Sunday. Usually this attracts further members because in the West, the majority are considered correct. Therefore, if the majority of people enjoy a particular church, then they believe there must be something right about it. Therefore numbers play a deciding role in whether a church is considered to be successful and growing.

Elmer Towns suggests that church growth has always been associated with numerical growth – this would include the numbers attending a particular service as well as new membership and baptisms. This growth is usually observable, a major indicator to the Western mind that a church is growing. In other words, churches

have become too numbers-focused. Mega-churches are made up of transfers from smaller churches. These smaller churches have had no means to compete with what the large churches offered. Church-growth as most perceive it was in fact just a transfer of souls and the church is actually worse off than before.¹⁸⁴

This statement shows that the West seems to find safety in numbers. They also tend to feel that the majority make the correct choice and so they all congregate together.

2.4.2 Buildings and structures

The larger the building, the more needs that are catered for and the more people who 'work' within its precinct, the more successful a church is considered. This hive of activity is also an indication of growth in the West. A most successful Western church is a church where for most of the week, the church building or parts of it are used for diverse functions, all under the name of the church.¹⁸⁵ Could this be an indication of the Western culture where busy-ness is considered good?

2.4.3 Outreach

The biggest problem has been that few Western Christians have ever led somebody to Christ. Many Christians see themselves as serving God by being available in the church for whatever 'ministry' they feel called to. It is distressing to notice that few feel called to reach outside the comfort zone of the four walls of the church – and get the Gospel out into the market place. Christians are God's instruments to bring

¹⁸⁴ Gary L. McIntosh and Paul E. Engle, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 38-40

¹⁸⁵ George Barna and Mark Hatch. *Boiling Point* (California: Ventura, Regal Books, 2001), 247-248

in the harvest; the harvest will not bring itself in. Thus, conversion growth is less likely in Western churches.

Church growth can also be seen as church health. A healthy organism is one that is vital and reproducing, hence attendance figures are not always a sign of health; reproduction is. This is a biological fact that can be equated to the church. Large mega-churches are less likely to start other churches, as people tend to flock to the mother church.

Wolfgang Simson suggests that adding members to the existing structure in general can never complete the mission of the church. He further suggests that the church needs to be a 'go-structure' instead of a 'come-structure'. The church needs to go out to the people.¹⁸⁶

(i) Go-structures

The Asian church is characterized by the so-called 'go-structure'. The Asian church meets for the celebration service but disperses to spread the Gospel. The Asian considers it a natural part of Christianity to share the Gospel with whoever wants to listen. Is this because Asians are better listeners and more open to the Gospel or is it because the Asian feels more prepared and confident to share his faith? We need to consider this point in the course of the study more fully.

(ii) The Seeker Model

Elmer Towns states that:

¹⁸⁶ Wolfgang Simson, *15 Theses towards a Reformation of Church* prophetic@revivalschool.com (accessed 12 December 2005).

Great growth gained using the seeker model will dwindle unless these churches become distinctive, counter cultural communities of faith. Large numbers alone do not equate success. Churches who plant new churches every two or three years will likely have more cohesion than mega churches, unless these churches are extremely intentional about discipling and community development.¹⁸⁷

McGavran said that the church is not here to care for itself only, but its most important function is to be a minister of God – reaching out to all the ethnic groups across the world.¹⁸⁸ This comment made by McGavran (cited in Van Engen) can raise serious questions about the way the Western church functions. Most Western churches appear to be in opposition to one another, even within a city. Although ministers have fraternal meetings and prayers, the members of the churches appear to think that the biggest church in town is best.

The Western churchgoers tend to swap churches easily within their lifetime too. Long-term commitment to a church has become rare in the West. In general, very little from the church funds is sown into mission work. With very little money to support missionaries sent out and even fewer members of the church having the confidence to share the Gospel, the Western church appears to be self-centred.

What can be done to inspire Western church members to sow more into the lives of the people around them and also further afield? Is this done by discipleship, laying greater stress on God's word, more prayer time within and without the church or

¹⁸⁷ Gary McIntosh and Paul Engle. *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 61

¹⁸⁸ Charles Van Engen, "Centrist View," in *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, Paul E Engle and Gary L McIntosh, eds. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 137

training leaders differently? How can the Western church convince the average churchgoer that the order Jesus gave in the Great Commission is an order to all people who call themselves Christian?

2.5 The Western package deal

The Western church has tried to bring the Gospel to all areas of the globe, but the way it has done this, seems to be the problem. The Western church does not appear to have lost its vision for mission altogether, but it has packaged it in books and tapes; thus it tries to spread the Gospel in the way it knows best from its high-tech point of view. However, this seems to have resulted in a watered-down Gospel where the free grace of God has taken a back seat.

Reverence for Almighty God and servant-hood as demonstrated by Jesus seems to have suffered too. For example, suffering and needy people cannot equate the servant-hood of Jesus with career missionaries arriving in private jets. As Howard Snyder says, “Under God, the Bible is the supreme and final authority concerning the church’s life and growth...”¹⁸⁹ Charles van Engen’s centrist view agrees with Snyder’s comment. Engen says, “Growth theory is grounded in a foundation of Scripture that draws from classical reading of the Bible regarding God’s mission (*missio Dei*).”¹⁹⁰ Snyder’s comment brings us back to the situation of the Word not been taken seriously enough and taught satisfactorily so that each Christian can grow and search the Scriptures further for themselves.

¹⁸⁹ Snyder Howard, “Renewal View,” *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*. Paul E Engle and Gary L McIntosh, eds. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 210

¹⁹⁰ Charles Van Engen, “Centrist View,” *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*. Paul E Engle and Gary L McIntosh, eds. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 133

The Asian church takes the Word very seriously and a Bible is a treasured object – it brings life. Is the West too concerned about entertaining people in a church service so that they feel they have ‘got something out of the service’? Why do Western Christians need to have a good time in church? Christ called us to spread His Word among the nations; this is a serious matter. What has caused the Western Christian to think that they need to feel things in a tangible way in a church service? Has this mentality been caused by the high budget Hollywood movies that entertain and so we feel we need the same input from the church. Is the West suffering from sensory overload? If this is so, then it could explain why most Western churches spend little time enjoying the presence of God in prayer. Prayer does lead to church growth because the individual matures to a new level in Christ. All the great revivals started because somebody prayed.

2.6 *The cost of discipleship and outreach*

The Western church has a huge task ahead in evangelising those in the so-called Western world.¹⁹¹ For example, the two least cost-effective countries for Christian outreach are Denmark and Switzerland. It costs 700 times more to baptise a convert in a rich country than a poor country. The three most cost-effective countries for Christian outreach are – Mozambique, Ethiopia and Tanzania. When considering costs (cost of ministry divided by number of baptisms per year) it would cost \$9803 per person in a poor country. This figure goes up to \$1,550,000 per person in the

¹⁹¹ Barrett and Johnson *Table 1-1 2001 in World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001), 520-529

USA.¹⁹² When we consider these figures, we see why the Western church has become so centred on spending the money on itself. It apparently has to in order to bring salvation to its members! Surely the Gospel, preached in a Biblical way, without any of the trimmings of the modern Western church, would be just as effective.

In this thesis I hope to pinpoint that the Asian church, although it spends more on mission outside its walls and less on itself, apparently grows much more effectively, both in numbers and in spiritual maturity. We need to study this in greater detail.

The fastest Christian expansion is taking place in China with 10 000 known converts every day; an estimated figure because of extreme persecution in areas. The Asian church stresses that all glory has to be given to God. Whenever the Gospel is preached, signs and wonders follow the proclamation of the news. These miracles confirm His Word and so sinners repent and believe. Miracles are not for the enjoyment of Christians inside a building, but to release the captives and point them to the Cross.¹⁹³

2.7 *Relationship and Christian family in the Asian church*

God's Word is vital in home group teaching. Asian families tend to be close knit – so the house system seems to suit the culture. The strongest home churches are made up of entire families attending. This system appears to be a non-threatening method of allowing people to hear the Word. In this way, Christianity is a way of life, integral

¹⁹² Barrett and Johnson *Table 1-1-2001 in World Christian Trends* (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2001), 520-529

¹⁹³ Paul Hattaway, *Asia Harvest letter*. April 2003 from Chiang Mai Thailand. For more information on current Asian church and house church statistics go to www.asiaharvest.org

to the family. Therefore, the individual is the church on the move, wherever they go. They come together to be strengthened in the house group.¹⁹⁴ The Gospel is then truly experienced as The Way. The early New Testament Christians referred to their new lives in Christ as The Way, as seen in Acts 2:9.

Hattaway further stresses that the Asian church believes that:

We have no desire to sit down and make our own plans. We only want to hear the voice of God and not human opinions, for we know that when the Lord reveals His will to us and we obey, our mission will be a success regardless of the results. Success is simply obeying God.¹⁹⁵

Here we see the greatest difference between the Western and Asian churches. The Western church measures success by numbers present in a service. The Asian church believes success is obeying God. The Asian church follows God's plans – they hear His voice because they wait on Him. The Western church is often making too much noise in their entertainment during church service to hear God. Surely hearing God's plan will point us in the right direction in the church. God's will is to grow the church and to see all lost souls saved. Christ would not have left us with the order to complete the Great Commission if it were impossible. However, it is impossible if the church follows its own plan and not God's desire.

The Asian church does not fear for supplies – remembering Hudson Taylor's words "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."¹⁹⁶ The childlike faith demonstrated in the house churches of Asia speaks loudly to the new converts. This

¹⁹⁴ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (US: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos, 1981), 56

¹⁹⁵ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 94

¹⁹⁶ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 105

reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit keeps the house churches in God's will.

The church is not strong in human terms or assets, but its strength lies in the invisible courage and faith of the disciples.

The early New Testament church had courage and faith but few supplies. They grew more quickly than any mega-church present on earth today. It is ironic that most Western churches consider themselves to be going back to the New Testament model, but they have forgotten the most important part, the carrying out of the Great Commission in simple faith and courage.

2.8 Gospel month in the Asian church

The Western church should not believe that the old way of family outreach of the early church does not work on earth today – it can and it does, when obedient and humble people reach out in the love of God to one another. Asian house churches have 'gospel months' where every believer is encouraged AND trained to bring at least three relatives or friends to Jesus. All are invited to take part in the 'gospel month' – any age or profession. The Gospel is known as The Way; new converts are looked after individually and shown the way practically. This is discipleship as Jesus showed it. Cho believes that each cell group only needs to lead one family to Christ for church growth to explode.¹⁹⁷

The Asian church believes that God grows the church, not a particular method. Acts 2:47 "...constantly praising God and in favour and goodwill with all people; and the Lord kept adding [to their number] daily those who were being saved [from spiritual

¹⁹⁷ David Yonggi Cho. *Successful Home Cell Groups* (US: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos Books, 1981), 80

death].”¹⁹⁸ It seems that God’s method works best. The church need not spend thousands of dollars on programs and packages from other churches. It is all contained in God’s word. A willing servant can add many to the Kingdom of God. One hundred thousand young Koreans pledge to spend one year spreading the gospel overseas. 4402 missionaries serve around the world – which is an increase of 116% between the years 1972-1996.¹⁹⁹ This pledge speaks of love for Jesus and passion to witness to the unsaved all over the world. This phenomenon is truly the wall-less church on the move.

David Bosch said that God Himself is the subject of mission. God always remains the author, although the witness is never excluded. This view stresses God and not denominationalism, as central in the Gospel message. When God is preached, less worldliness comes into the equation, and so a purer church is ‘grown’.²⁰⁰ Bosch is correct in that he said that when we stress God and when He is central in our faith and then denominationalism is less important. In the Western church today, they try to steer away from denominationalism in the bid to have ‘more freedom’. However, in spite of this, the Western church seems to feel more comfortable under the so-called ‘covering’ of a larger ministry.

Once again they have entered denominationalism. Denominationalism decides the way a church is run, instead of God running the church. Very few denominations exist in China. Those that are in existence have been approved by the communist

¹⁹⁸ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

¹⁹⁹ Larry Keys “A Global Harvest Force” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Ed. Ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 2004), 745

²⁰⁰ David Bosch, “Witness to the World” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movements* 3rd Ed, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 59

regime.²⁰¹ Obviously they may be forced to listen less to God and more to the overhead authorities. Strangely enough, these denominational churches have grown very little compared to the house churches where they are answerable directly to God.

This understanding of mission is seen in the Asian church movement where they do not erect church buildings. On the other hand, the Western church seems to be concerned about erecting a building as soon as a few people gather together in a particular place. The Asian church says “They need Jesus and they need to worship and grow in God’s grace with other believers within their own homes, according to the pattern of the first church in the New Testament.”²⁰²

We can notice the difference in the Western and Asian understanding of church growth. From the above statement in Hattaway, the Western church is considered to be growing when they erect a building. The Asian church is considered to be growing when they grow in God’s grace with other believers. The Western church values seeing structures rise to accommodate numbers. The Asian church sees spiritual growth and maturity as church growth.

2.9 Deliverance

The Asian church lays stress on the supernatural power of God to deliver all people and anoint them to take the Gospel message out into the entire world. What is meant by deliver is – when people are set free from their old lives and converted to a

²⁰¹ Protestant Three Self Patriotic Movement. (TSPM). Apparently Maoist attitudes can still be found in this organization but are rejected by Chinese intellectuals and other Christians. For more information read Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 19

²⁰² Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 129

new way of living in Christ. The Asian Christian expects God to make His presence felt at meetings. They have seen God work supernaturally every time they meet. They expect God to lead the meetings through His Holy Spirit. They realise they cannot bring the Word to the entire world without relying completely on God Almighty. Therefore church growth in the Asian church is not understood to be large numbers within a church, or buildings to house those who worship, but rather the spiritual growth of individuals, through discipleship within house churches where they stress intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit.²⁰³ From the house churches they reach out as an invisible army to bring even more people to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The Asian considers the church to be the believers themselves moving with the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to tell more people about Jesus and in so doing, to see God change their lives completely.

The Western church in general, on the other hand, relies on its own resources mixed with the promptings of the Holy Spirit to lead them into mission. One must question whether the Western church is expecting less from God simply because they have many resources and have lost sight of the time spent in prayer that the Asian church considers so vital. MacArthur, cited in Gilley aptly said “many Christians have the misconception that to win the world to Christ we must first win the world’s favour.”²⁰⁴

In the study of the NLCC as an Asian church in a Western setting, I hope to pinpoint the principles used in the church to grow individuals into a dynamic wall-less church.

²⁰³ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (US: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1981), 116-126

²⁰⁴ Gary Gilley. *This Little Church went to Market* ((US: Webster, Evangelical Press, 2005), 19

These principles may be applied to other post-Christian churches to increase growth of individuals as well as to increase awareness of the need to complete the Great Commission.

2.10 Summary

From the above discussion one can assume that the Western church may learn some vital lessons from the Asian church. In the past the Asian church was considered the mission ground for the Western church. The Western church appears to be impacted by the world far more than the Asian church. It could be a situation of the world having too much influence in the church, rather than the church being counter-cultural in its role to bring the lost to a saving knowledge of the Gospel. Bryant's article, *What it Means to Be a World Christian*, suggests that Christians need a world vision so that they may play a role in fulfilling the worldwide purpose of God.²⁰⁵

The world also presents information in a certain way, but should the church adopt this same method? In the process it appears as if the Gospel is watered down compared to the effect of the preaching of the Gospel in the Asian church. God's Word is Holy Spirit inspired and need not or should not, be presented in a worldly way. In the light of the above study, it seems the reverence and awe for Almighty God may be lost in the busy-ness of the church.

The Western church appears to be catering for many needs within the church, but the need for strong intercessors to guide the leaders appears to be less pronounced

²⁰⁵ David Bryant, "What it means to be a World Christian," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 702-703

than in the Asian church. The Western church appears to see meeting the needs of people as their goal, instead of meeting God. The Western church's desire to meet the needs of the people does bring more connection between people, but the Asian church brings more community through upholding the Bible as the most important standard. There is a difference between connection and community. Miley's article, *The Awesome Potential for Mission Found in Local Churches*, stresses that the greatest resource of the local church is her people.²⁰⁶ It appears that this resource is well used in the Asian church and promotes community as seen earlier in this chapter.

The Western church seems to equate success in a church with the idea that the church needs to be popular and have several hundred members. We have seen in the above study that a stronger church is often one made up of many smaller groups making up the community of God. This is confirmed in the findings of Donahue and Robinson who suggest that God is communal and we should respond by building church as a community. They equate the success of Willow Creek church with community awareness because it is a church of small groups and therefore practices community and relational integrity.²⁰⁷

We serve an awesome God; we cannot put Him in a box or wrap Him in a program. The Asian church expects a miracle-working God to show up at meetings, they expect the impossible. The Asian church does not try to understand God in human terms; they see God as God. They believe that when they serve God and give Him

²⁰⁶ George Miley, "The Awesome Potential for Mission Found in Local Churches," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 729

²⁰⁷ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups* (US; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001), 14-23

the honour, He increases the numbers because through His Holy Spirit, man is impassioned to share the Good News in obedience to Jesus' order in the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is not 'great' because it is impossible or a huge task; it is great because it is the utmost calling on man. The Western church should not water it down into counting heads in a church, but should see it as lives saved to enjoy God forever. Church growth has eternal value. It needs to be studied in greater detail in order to change a lukewarm church into a church burning with passion to serve God and in so doing, to complete the Great Commission. The Laodicean church in the Book of Revelation is called a lukewarm church – neither hot nor cold. The church needs to be alive for Christ and taking His Good News of grace to the ends of the earth. Butler, in his article, *The Power of Partnership* suggests that the third world church takes its place alongside the Western church so that together the worldwide church may reach the nearly two billion who have not yet heard the Gospel.²⁰⁸ The church must complete the Great Commission – we are the church.

²⁰⁸ Philip Butler, "The Power of Partnership," *Perspectives in the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 753

CHAPTER 3

THE GREAT COMMISSION: A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

The previous chapter demonstrated that the Western church has not taken the Great Commission as seriously as Jesus intended when He gave the order to the believers to spread His Word to all nations. The Western nations took mission seriously in earlier years, but now it has become secondary to other church activities.

I include the chapter on the Great Commission because I think it is vital within the context of this study. The concept of the wall-less church will be misunderstood unless it is seen within the context of the Great Commission.

It is important to study the Great Commission in order to understand church growth, and the Asian church in general and the New Life City Church (NLCC), Perth in particular. The description that follows shows how the NLCC understands Jesus words about the Great Commission. The NLCC takes the Great Commission seriously, giving the impression that the NLCC is a wall-less church. We need to understand the Great Commission first in order to analyse the phenomenon of 'mobility' within the NLCC.

I believe it is important to first understand what Jesus meant in His order to complete the Great Commission. Against this background knowledge, we can analyse the situation within the Chinese House churches as well as the NLCC.

My aim in this chapter in exploring a Biblical understanding of the Great Commission based on literary work is essentially to develop theological ideas in order that a theoretical framework may be developed for the empirical research that will follow in subsequent chapters.

3.1 *The order from Jesus*

In Matthew 28:18-20 word of Jesus are recorded:

Jesus approached and breaking the silence, said to them, all authority (power of rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion), to the [very] close and consummation of the age. Amen (so let it be.)²⁰⁹

Similarly Mark 16:15 states “And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach and publish openly the good news (the Gospel) to every creature [of the whole human race].”²¹⁰ Acts 1:8 adds to these thoughts “But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth.”²¹¹ Most Biblical scholars realise that when a particular message is repeated at least three times in the Bible, it is an important issue. The

²⁰⁹ *Amplified Bible*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ Ibid

above three passages were spoken by Jesus Himself – and so should never be ignored by Christians/the church.

3.2 Results of the Great Commission in the birth of the church

We realise the Gospel spread quickly around Jerusalem and outward after the martyr death of Stephen.²¹² During times of persecution the church needed to go ‘underground’ but still grew.²¹³ Later during the phase of the so-called organised church, growth seemed to slow down. At present, we find the fastest growth in Asian churches, especially in areas of persecution.²¹⁴ We also find that the Asian churches in Australia appear to be dynamic churches. We need to question what the New Life City Church in Perth has in common with churches in Asia and so detect reasons for the growth within the church and the out-reach growth outside the walls of the church. How do churches generally understand the Great Commission?

3.3 What has happened to the Great Commission? – The opinion- bouncing group

A sample has been taken of a group of Christians not involved in the New Life City Church. They have been asked about the Great Commission and what their understanding of the roles played by the first Christians and the role present-day Christians should play. I considered it necessary to see what the general Australian,

²¹² Stephen died a martyr’s death by stoning. See Acts 7:54-60

²¹³ Underground- refers to a church meeting secretly in order to avoid detection by a governing authority in particular area or context.

²¹⁴ Paul Hattaway, “Fire and Blood” *Asia Harvest* (July 2007), 4-5

Hattaway has seen the growth of the Asian church since the persecution of the 1970s. Between five and ten million Christians in the persecuted church has grown to 130 million known Christians within 30 years. For further information read Hattaway’s book, ‘China’s Book of Martyrs’ 2007 More information on the persecuted church may be found at www.ChinaAid.org

as a first- world citizen, thought of the Great Commission. I also needed to question a small sample group not involved in the New Life City Church (NLCC) in order to use it as a so-called opinion-bouncing group. This will give me an opinion-bouncing group to compare the NLCC against.

a. Selection

An opinion-bouncing group comprising ten Christians was selected. The selection process proved more difficult than I expected. I wanted to get the feel of the general Australian public and found that the best place was a shopping mall. I was hard pressed to find ten Christians out of 37 people I approached. Most people did not want to answer questions because they did not consider themselves to be Christians. They argued that they believed there is a higher power called God – but they did not attend church or have a personal relationship with Him.

b. The 10 Selected Participants – background

The ten selected participants all admitted that they acknowledge God but not all in the group are frequent church attendants. All interviews were individually conducted in a single session with each participant. The backgrounds of the ten participants are as follows.

- During our interviews it came to the fore that all believe they are Christian although some admit that they only attend church 'on occasion'. All in the group acknowledge God as Father God.
- Half (five) the group questioned are from more traditional churches. By traditional churches I mean the older more organised or main-line churches.

These churches include one interviewee from the Anglican Church, two interviewees from the Roman Catholic, another interviewee attends the Uniting Church and the fifth interviewee from a traditional church was a Lutheran Church member. The Anglican admits that he attends church whenever he can, but not necessarily every Sunday. The first Catholic interviewee attends mass every week and sometimes more often. The second Catholic interviewee admits that he seldom attends church.

- The remaining five interviewees were from diverse church groups. These church groups included two Asian church members from the Vineyard church group. The third Asian Christian in the group is from the Christian City Church group.²¹⁵ The remaining two participants are from independent Pentecostal churches.²¹⁶

3.4 Interview results and deductions

- All ten interviewees feel that they know God and that they lead a good life.
- Only five of the group of ten interviewees take the words of Jesus on the Great Commission seriously. Three of the five are Asian and they feel that they have a specific calling from God as Christians to complete the Great Commission by spreading God's Word wherever they go.

²¹⁵ Christian City Church is commonly known as The Triple C church or C3. This group of churches was started in Sydney by Pastor Phil Pringle. The first Christian City Church expanded to several churches across Australia and now includes 230 churches across the globe. The New South Wales government required that the C3 church group declare themselves a denomination because of the ministers in the group seeking marriage licences. This is how the current C3 movement started. For more information see <http://www.christiancitychurch.com> (Accessed 30 May 2009).

²¹⁶ The independent Pentecostal churches referred to here included one interviewee from an independent apostolic church and the other from a "New Wine Church."

- The Christians from the traditional churches all feel that it is the minister's duty or at best, that of 'the church'. When I challenged them with the point that they are actually the church, they found this concept foreign. They feel that they do not have the training or the knowledge to witness or lead anyone to the Lord. The Catholic interviewees feel that their church is already worldwide and the pope is world renowned and respected.
- All three the Asians interviewees in this group see themselves as the church.
- The Pentecostal Christians in this group realise they are the church but admit feeling more comfortable inviting others to church in order to hear the gospel there, instead of confronting people outside of the church.
- Only half the group (five) interviewees have never been taught specifically about the Great Commission or realise that this is a callings for all Christians. They feel that it was possibly a historical order from Jesus to the then disciples. These five interviewees are all from the traditional churches mentioned earlier.
- Not one of these five people from the traditional churches had ever led anyone to Jesus. None of them had ever thought of going on mission. They believe that missionaries were taught at Bible College and from there were called for a 'stint' in the mission field. They all believe that the minister should attract people to the church with good sermons and Bible studies and possibly other programs. They all feel that the church has lost some of its relevancy in life, although they all admit that in crises people tend to search for God.

- The remaining five interviewees had been taught about the Great Commission in church services or Bible study. Two of these people feel that they are doing 'mission' or outreach work by inviting people to church; neither of these two people had ever led anyone to Christ. Both of these people were from the independent Pentecostal group of churches.
- The three Asian people interviewed, seemed to take God's word more seriously, most specifically regarding the Great Commission. They all feel that it has a definite bearing on their lives.
- Only one of the Asian people had led somebody to Christ. The other two said they had 'come close' but had instead taken people to church and Bible study where they received Jesus.

The figures above are somewhat shocking in a first-world country such as Australia as they illuminate the extent to which the Great Commission is misunderstood or possibly completely ignored by the church. The aforementioned statistics highlight a fundamental and noteworthy difference, where 100% of the Asians interviewed feel that they must play a part in the completion of the Great Commission. However, we notice that all of the Asian Christians interviewed come from the so-called Pentecostal group of churches. In spite of the aforementioned fact, several other members of the group are also from Pentecostal churches and they did not feel called to play their part in completing the Great Commission.

We can deduce that when people understand that they are the church, they see the commands of Jesus differently. We see that they take Scriptural commands seriously and believe that they are responsible for the present generation living on earth. It is

in this context that one sees the importance of closely observing the Great Commission in order to see the true calling of the church by Christ.

3.5 *Repentance and conviction of sins as the seeds of church growth*

In the light of the above deductions from the opinion-bouncing group we can say that most Christians are not fully aware of their role or authority as Christians, especially outside of the church building. They do not see themselves as having an active role as a Christian in everyday life. This brings to mind some comments made by Finney when he said that most Christians were, in fact, not living in a state of true salvation at all, in spite of professing to be Christians.

One of his comments on revival is, “The arousing, quickening, and reclaiming of the backsliders in the church and the general awakening of the classes, and insuring attention to the claims of God.”²¹⁷ He apparently sees the church as mostly ‘unsaved’ and spends most of his life bringing salvation messages to the church – with results. Charles Finney concentrates on repentance as a specific theme. He says, “Revival is a renewed conviction of sin and repentance, followed by an intense desire to live in obedience to God. It is giving up one’s will to God in deep humility.”²¹⁸ Matthew Henry says, “Some people do not like to hear much of repentance...”²¹⁹ A sin needs to be called a sin – only then it will lead to repentance. Could it be that the church is too polite to convict sinners?

²¹⁷ Charles Finney, *Great Revival Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 3 November 2007)

²¹⁸ Charles Finney *Great Revival Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndes.net> (accessed 7 September 2008)

²¹⁹ Matthew Henry *Great Revival Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 3 November 2007)

A Godly standard of life may attract as many to Christianity as lofty, yet promising, words from the pulpit from someone who seems 'spiritual' and respectable. Godly standards are only upheld when we know and are taught what sin is. Charles Finney appears to convict people in the church very easily with his sermons. He says that, "Ministers often preach about the Gospel instead of preaching the Gospel. They often preach about sinners instead of preaching to them."²²⁰ Jesus reminded us continually to repent and warned us that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repentance is always a requirement for fellowship with God, and for that matter, for continued fellowship with God.²²¹ In the book of Acts we see repentance, water baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit as events that followed in quick succession.²²²

3.6 *Jesus called nations*

From a Scriptural perspective, Christ has required that we spread the Word throughout the world. In other words, we need a greater vision for spreading the Gospel, but we depend on the mercy of God to do this. Taylor in his article, *A Call to Service*, suggests firstly earnest prayer is vital to bring labourers and secondly a deeper spiritual life of the church.²²³ In Scripture we realise the Word spread from families to other cultures. Chua Wee Hian points out the use of family groups to spread the Gospel in an informal manner. Hian brought to mind how God stressed importance of family as seen in Ephesians 2:19 "...the household of God..." or the

²²⁰ Charles Finney *More Great Quotes*,

<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 2 May 2009)

²²¹ Scripture verses on repentance cover many areas in the Scriptures, including – Ps 34:14, James 4:7-10, Acts 14:15, Isaiah 55:7, Joel 2:12-13, 2 Kings 17:13, 1 Th. 1:9

²²² Scripture verses illustrating this point may be found in the Book of Acts. Eg: Acts 10:44-48, Acts 11:15-18, Acts 2:4, Acts 19:1-6, Acts 22:16.

²²³ J. Hudson Taylor, "The Call to Service," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 303

“...household of faith...” as seen in Galatians 6:10. We can see this pattern of family units coming to salvation in Cornelius, the centurion in Acts 10:1-2. In this passage, Cornelius and his family are referred to as “...devout and God-fearing.”²²⁴ Joshua 24:15 states that “.... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” This indicates a household decision to serve God.

The apostolic pattern for teaching in and also through the family unit can be seen in various other instances in the Gospel, for example: In the book of Acts 16:15, 31-34, we read that Paul led Lydia and the jailer and all their families to Christ and then they joined in fellowship. Further, we notice in the book of Acts that the church of the time met in homes. The home church meetings of the early church proved most successful. The situation of home and house churches will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

It is commonly known in mission work, that when a whole village is taught the Gospel, people usually make a commitment to become Christians more easily than if they were approached individually. Chua Wee Hian mentions that the “...one-by-one method of individual evangelism will not work in such a society.” He goes further to say that most Malay students are Muslim. This means that “Islam consists not of belief in Allah the supreme God – it is community.”²²⁵ In other words, mission or outreach to these areas must be done in ‘community’ and not on an individual basis. We see this particularly among the different cultural groups. An example of the

²²⁴ Chua Wee Hian, “Evangelization of Whole Families” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 615

²²⁵ Chua Wee Hian, “Evangelization of Whole Families” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 615

cultural approach to call nations would be the following comment from Hian. Muslim women cannot be given the gospel message and asked to make a decision for Jesus, because in their culture they need to consult their husbands first. The Gospel is spread more readily when the message is brought openly to a whole Muslim village where there is no undermining of the cultural beliefs. Cultural imperialism needs to be avoided as it stands in the way of God's love being shown to those we witness to.²²⁶

Avoidance of cultural imperialism means that the Gospel is spread in a spirit of humility, Jesus being our perfect example. We can demonstrate this comment further when we consider Wagner's interpretation of how differently cultures perceive their world. Wagner comments that most non-Westerners have a three-tiered worldview. It is as follows according to Wagner. The top tier is the cosmic tier; the bottom tier represents everyday life and the middle tier is a large area of interaction of the cosmic and everyday life. The non-Westerner believes that this middle tier is controlled by the supernatural, such as demons, spirits, ghosts, magic and the ancestors. Wagner argues that Westerners try to deny the existence of the middle zone because they do not believe in it. This has led to Western Christian missions being seen as "...the greatest secularising forces in history."²²⁷ By the same token, Ralph D. Winter felt that the Great Commission is impossible to fulfil "...so long as people enamoured of Eastern culture do not understand that Chinese and

²²⁶ Chua Wee Hian, "Evangelisation of Whole Families" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004) 615

²²⁷ C. Peter Wagner, "On the Cutting Edge" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 539

Muslims can and must as easily become evangelical Christians without abandoning their cultural systems as did the Greeks in Paul's day..."²²⁸

Jesus sent us out to the nations and cultures, we need to respect that as part of the people and bring the Gospel message within that culture. It is often most effective to have one's own people bring the gospel message within the known cultural environment. Those of a particular culture are used to the sensitivities within a culture and so avoid contentious issues and bring the Gospel in an acceptable and understandable package. McGarvan, in *The Bridges of God*, raises the issue of taking cultural sensitivities into consideration.²²⁹ Winter suggests social differences are more important in mission than language differences in his article, *The New Macedonia*.²³⁰

3.7 Jesus gave authority

Biblically speaking, once we have committed our lives to Christ, we are under His Kingship. Jesus is sovereign over the whole earth and we as believers are expected to acknowledge His divine authority.²³¹ This means that all the authority that Jesus gave to us, we need to operate in while we spread the Gospel wherever we may be. Many Christians believe that we need to wait for the minister or professional missionaries to spread the Gospel. This seems to be the general understanding in our opinion-bouncing group interviewed.

²²⁸ Ralph D. Winter, "Wartime Lifestyle" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 706

²²⁹ Donald A McGavran, "The Bridges of God," *Ibid*, 323-338

²³⁰ Ralph D Winter, "The New Macedonia," *Ibid*, 339-353

²³¹ 1 Chronicles 16:31, 29:11, Ex 15:18, Ps 9:7-8, 103:19, Isa 37:16, Mk 1:14-15, Lk 4:43, 11:20, 16:16, 1 Co 15:24, Rev 11:15. These texts illustrate God's divine authority.

The above interpretations make us realise that a good understanding of Scriptures is important, but understanding the authority that goes with the knowledge of the Scriptures is vital in completing the Great Commission. This factor mobilizes Christians into action. The action of individuals brings church growth to the whole body of Christ, but it also brings additional growth in the Spirit to the individual Christians who are mobilized to spread the Word.

It seems that the Western church may need to move from putting the emphasis on tradition, local church government and power and authority of the top echelons of the church, instead shifting their focus onto something more supernatural and spirit-led. In fact, this supernatural power has been given by God to empower believers, to reach out into the world in order to bring the Word of God with transformational power and healing. This is the authority Jesus was talking about. John R. Mott says “The greatest hindrances to the evangelisation of the world are those within the Church.”²³² Gary Althorp says of the present day church, “There is no doubt that the further the boundaries are stretched, the further men lead the Church away from Biblical foundations, the more insecure the people of God become. In order to keep the crowds, the arm of flesh is displayed.”²³³

David Yonggi Cho explains that church growth is vital because Jesus came to build His church. Cho said, “Church growth is not just another fad. Jesus came to build a Church, and that Church has been asleep until now.”²³⁴ The quote of Yonggi Cho suggests that with Jesus on our side, we can experience church growth. Jesus is the

²³² John R. Mott, *More Great Quotes*, <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 25 January 2008).

²³³ Gary Althorp, *The Devil's Playground: The Church* (Singapore: Kings Publications, 1997), 175

²³⁴ David Yonggi Cho & Harold Hostetler, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (USA: Florida, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), 99

power behind church growth, not human effort. Rather, the supernatural power and guidance of the Holy Spirit builds the church and gives life. Jesus said that we were given all authority when He sent out the believers to complete the Great Commission.

3.8 *The church and the lost sheep*

We have been given the authority by Jesus to complete the Great Commission. The Great Commission is really the bringing of God's light into a dark world. A.W. Tozer commented "Those who have the light, are peacefully at rest, asleep in it."²³⁵ This comment by Tozer suggests that the authority Jesus has given to every one of His followers needs to be taken out into the streets to call in the lost sheep. Jesus' parable about the 99 sheep and the one lost sheep suggests that the shepherd or Christian, who knows Christ, leaves the 99 in a safe place to find the one lost sheep. See Matthew 18: 12 for the lost sheep parable. I believe we can see that those who know Jesus are in a safe place, but everyone has been called to reach out to the lost. We can only do this by taking the Great Commission seriously and allowing the church to be wall-less and outward looking. C. Peter Wagner refers to the parable of the lost sheep when he mentions that the shepherd in the church needs to spend time nurturing existing Christians. The shepherds must be aware of the quality and quantity. He says that the shepherd should not rest long enough to have others lost

²³⁵ A. W. Tozer *More Great Quotes*, <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (nd).

in the process. Wagner's further comment is that the church today more likely has 30 in the fold and 70 outside of it.²³⁶

A fuller understanding of the Great Commission has the potential to inspire Christians out of "churchi-anity" and into kingdom authority. By kingdom authority I mean that the church no longer considers itself and its influence on a local level, but much further afield. Howard Snyder mentioned that the "...economy of God is the Kingdom of God."²³⁷ By this Snyder means that the whole of creation should "...acknowledge and serve him as Sovereign King."²³⁸ The kingdom principles Jesus taught need to be put to practical use in serving the market place. It can be said that this can only take place once each individual as 'the church', realises the power and authority Jesus has instilled in him or her. In effect, the *glory of the Lord* will be taken outside the four walls of the church into the whole marketplace.²³⁹ The radical changes that take place can be expected to reverberate into the education and business systems as well as into the entertainment and government systems. Christians see a miracle-working God, so we should expect the miraculous. The Great Commission is indeed an active, powerful and all conquering movement. Oswald J. Smith said, "Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfil the Great Commission has forfeited its Biblical right to exist."²⁴⁰

²³⁶ C. Peter Wagner, "On the Cutting Edge" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph A. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 533

²³⁷ Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 1983), 28

²³⁸ Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 1983), 28

²³⁹ Glory of the Lord – by this term I mean that the power and authority of God should be seen outside of the church and into the world. In this way the church serves God by taking the Gospel message to all people and in the process, God's name is acknowledged and revered.

²⁴⁰ Oswald J. Smith, *More Great Revival Quotes*, <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 3 November 2007).

3.9 *Jesus gave the power*

The power Jesus speaks about is related somewhat to the authority He referred to in Matthew 28:18 – “All Authority...” In reference to Acts 1:8, we see that Jesus informs the followers that they will receive “power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”²⁴¹ It is clear that without understanding the power of the Holy Spirit, our efforts to spread the Gospel may prove to be frustrating and even futile. Could this fact be what the church is missing – they have forgotten that Jesus has empowered believers to complete the Great Commission?

The church should impact on the community and bring God’s transforming power into everyday life. It appears that the church has forgotten that Jesus gave the power and it needs to be used. Programs may keep members occupied, but the transforming power of God needs to be experienced. We need to expect the Holy Spirit to be present in power whenever we witness. The act of witnessing should take place outside the church. Oswald J. Smith said “We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first.”²⁴²

That is the world vision that Jesus left us with. We should not be intimidated by it; rather, we should feel encouraged to move out in victory with the power given to us at the beginning of the church age. Wagner suggests that missionaries were saddened by the fact that Christianity has been presented as a ‘...religion of the textbook and the head...’ rather than an encounter with God in which signs and

²⁴¹ *Amplified Bible* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan 1999)

²⁴² Oswald J. Smith, *More Great Revival Quotes*,
<http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 3 November 2007).

wonders are seen as the Word is preached.²⁴³ This is an illustration of the desire outreach teams have for the power of Jesus to manifest itself when they bring the Gospel message to the unsaved. This is not always the case in many churches today.

Amy and Bill Stearns commented that Acts 1:8 should be seen as an integrated vision. By this they mean that “.... You shall be my witness BOTH in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.”²⁴⁴ They suggest that the impact of the Gospel should be on a local level as well as on an international level simultaneously. This would suggest ministries working in unity for the greater will of God – and that is the completion of the Great Commission.

3.10 Finances and outreach

Churches throughout history have used lack of finances as the reason for not evangelising. The small amount normally set aside in the church budget for evangelism does not go far. We can look back to see the example of Paul and others in the time of the Book of Acts, following a ‘tentmaker’ ministry. The tentmaker ministry of Paul’s day became less popular through the ages until the concept of ‘professional missionaries’ was born.

Ruth Siemens suggests that tentmakers have an advantage.²⁴⁵ Tentmakers can gain access to many restricted areas/countries that would normally be closed to Christian

²⁴³ C. Peter Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 538

²⁴⁴ Bill and Amy Stearns, “The Power of Integrated Vision” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1999), 724

²⁴⁵ Ruth E. Siemens, “Tentmakers Needed” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1999), 734

workers. The tentmakers keep the cost of evangelism down by paying for their own living expenses. Additionally, tentmakers usually stay longer in areas because they have a dual task of sharing the Gospel and working in the open market. Could today's global-village job market be God's way of opening areas to evangelism in order to complete the Great commission? The global job market may also have the effect of bringing people out of countries that have historically been 'closed' to the Gospel message. Tentmaker ministry allows evangelists into an area where they can minister and work cost effectively.

Interestingly, from a different perspective, many young people from countries previously closed to the Gospel have been allowed to study elsewhere. When they return to their villages, they bring the Gospel message with them. It appears that the message from a returned local is more easily accepted, according to Wang and Chan.²⁴⁶

We have just seen that God can use returning students to evangelise countries. The church needs to be ready and attentive to overseas students and migrants. God is using the global village to spread His Gospel in a different way from the traditional missionary who is not always cost effective. This also alerts every member of the body of Christ to the fact that migrants within our schools, universities and jobs are the mission field and we are the missionaries. The Great Commission can be completed one person at a time, and it begins with each one of us. This is the most economical way to spread the Good News.

²⁴⁶ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, "Christian Witness to the Chinese." *Perspectives in the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 645

3.11 “Make disciples”

Jesus mentioned in Matthew 28:18-20 that we are to make disciples of all nations. Discipleship of new converts has proved to be the vital growth point in the Asian churches in particular. Bible knowledge allows the various house churches to guard against heresies. Asian people love to learn and gain knowledge. They appear to have the same tendency with the Bible. This phenomenon brings to mind the passage from Habbakuk 2:14 “...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.”²⁴⁷

In the light of the above passage, we realise that many churches are guilty of not taking discipleship as seriously as Jesus did. Within a house church situation it is often far easier to teach disciples than within a larger, more traditional church setting. House churches allow for the leaders to detect areas of weakness in the understanding of the Gospel and any misunderstandings of the work of the Holy Spirit. It appears that when a small group is nurtured in the way Jesus nurtured His disciples, there is less chance of heresies and a greater chance to spread the love of the Gospel from the experience in the group.

This means that Bible knowledge plus experience in the Christian walk equals discipleship. Discipleship leads to maturity in faith and results in outreach. This is what the church should strive for – the point where Christians feel mature and confident enough to reach out to others, outside the church and bring them to

²⁴⁷ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

salvation. George Patterson suggests that spontaneous multiplication of the church will take place when discipleship takes place along four simple rules.²⁴⁸

These are:

- i)- Loving and knowing the people that you disciple.
- ii) - Disciples must be mobilized to edify those that they disciple.
- iii) - Jesus' basic commands must be taught in love.
- iv) - Relationships between disciples and churches must be a loving relationship, and they should be accountable to one another, and so in turn produce more churches.

The above basic principles seem too easy; although when these concepts are followed the teachers/leaders will be humble and accept different people and cultures in love. It has been demonstrated that the love of our neighbour is the most important command. Patterson goes on further to suggest that each believer needs to be taught to witness to friends and relatives. In other words, a loving relationship is easy to cultivate in such a safe Christian environment.²⁴⁹ Love and care breaks down all walls. The Gospel is accepted more easily in a situation of mutual love and respect.

²⁴⁸ George Patterson, "The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 596

²⁴⁹ George Patterson, "The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 598 and 602.

An ideal church will have moved away from a pastor-centred church to a whole church of disciples, obeying God's word and moving out into the open market to bring new converts to worship God. A lack of discipleship within a church seems to be present in a passive church with an active, but overworked pastor. It is obvious from Matthew 28:18-20 that Jesus expected all His disciples to become active. The order is to go and make further disciples, hence multiplying the Word to all people and nations. From the Word of Jesus we can determine that we are all called to be disciples and to disciple in turn. Discipleship is the natural seed to birth new converts and so grow new churches.

Disciples have the heart for spreading the Word. They can nurture those they have brought to salvation. This personal caring is more effective than a pastor preaching love from a pulpit. However, this presents the organized church with the dilemma of starting up discipleship courses and getting people prepared to spread the Word, instead of relying so heavily on the pastor. All churchgoers should be taught to be disciples by preparing them to know God's Word and to defend it in the open market place.

Discipleship has the effect of mobilizing the church for God's work throughout the week. We need to move from a situation of seeing our ministry as – teaching Sunday School or cleaning church toilets – to something far bigger; that of bringing souls to Jesus. We serve a great God – let us expect great things from Him. A disciple is a person who is committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, but also to the body of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably

Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.²⁵⁰

We read what Jesus said in the Book of Matthew 9:36-38:

“ ... Jesus said to His disciples, the harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few; so pray to the Lord of the harvest, to FORCE OUT AND THRUST labourers into His harvest.”²⁵¹

Jesus saw that there is a great harvest ready to be brought in, but too few people feel confident enough to share God’s Word and so bring in the harvest. Jesus continually told us to look to Him for our help. He also said that nothing is impossible. This means that all churches/Christians can bring in the harvest, no matter their size or financial position. No areas are closed to Jesus, because He is all-powerful. The point is to walk in the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit. Our lives should reflect the transforming power of the Word of God. It is not enough to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to be walking in the Spirit and so demonstrate the quickening power of His Word.

It is known, and demonstrated in the earlier interview of ten Christians, that only a small number of Christians have ever won a soul to Christ. This indeed proves that Jesus’ words are so true – the ‘labourers are few’. In our opinion-bouncing group, 90% of the Christians had never led anyone to Jesus. In that same group we notice that only 50% saw themselves as part of the labourers. In the 50% who saw themselves as labourers, one interviewee actually brought someone to salvation.

²⁵⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *More Great Quotes*, <http://www.SermonIndex.net> (accessed 7 December 2008).

²⁵¹ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

Wagner referred to James Montgomery who left Overseas Crusades in the 1980's to start a new mission agency known as DAWN. DAWN stands for "Discipling a Whole Nation" and is a concept in which they aim to mobilize the whole body of Christ within a particular nation to make an effort to complete the Great Commission.²⁵² Montgomery suggests that people groups within a country are the most practical way of reaching the non-Christian in that particular community. This phenomenon of reaching out, as a whole church, during the week after a Sunday worship service, results in a wall-less church. A church without walls is a mobilized army of disciples for God – the phenomenon I see in the New Life City Church in Perth. For this reason, it is important to understand the dynamics of the New Life City Church and possibly learn from their approach to church.

3.12 "Baptise them"

Matthew 28:18-20 goes further in that Jesus said we must "... disciple to all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit..."²⁵³ Baptism has always been a contentious issue in the church. However, this public demonstration of a life committed to Christ has far-reaching consequences for those who obey Jesus' command. Tony Lambert explains that in some areas of China, pastors baptise new converts in mass baptisms sometimes into the early hours of the morning.²⁵⁴

George Patterson as cited in Winter and Hawthorne, explains the effect of baptism in an interesting way. He says:

²⁵² C. Peter Wagner, "On the Cutting Edge" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 536

²⁵³ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

²⁵⁴ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 32

Baptise all repentant believers without delay.... I delayed baptism to make sure they were “safe”. But soon saw that the very reason many fell away was my distrust. That’s the funny thing about God’s grace; He wants us to let is slop over on the unworthy (Romans 5:20-21).²⁵⁵

Baptism since before the time of John the Baptist was seen as a process whereby non-Jews became part of the Jewish community. This loyalty change is demonstrated by being baptised into a new life. The fact that baptism takes place IN the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, demonstrates clearly to onlookers where the new allegiance lies. By being baptised ‘into’ God’s family, God gathers more people to Himself, so increasing His family on earth. This family is known as the church.

Mark 16:16 says, “He who BELIEVES and is BAPTIZED will be saved...”²⁵⁶

Clearly Jesus emphasises we need to believe – that is – make a commitment for life, and then baptism needs to take place. Do we need to wait for church programs or the church calendar before believers are baptised? I will study this issue of baptism in the New Life City Church to detect if that has an effect on the outcome of discipleship as part of the fact that they appear to be a wall-less church. It will also be interesting to see how soon NLCC baptises their new believers and if a faster baptism means faster spiritual growth and quicker outreach into the marketplace.

²⁵⁵ George Patterson, “The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (William Carey Library, Pasadena California 1999) 598

²⁵⁶ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

3.13 “Teaching them”

After baptism, Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20, “... teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you...”²⁵⁷ When we notice the order in which Jesus commanded the Great Commission, we realise that we need to become disciples first, and then the teaching follows. A disciple follows and obeys Jesus and is committed to the body of Christ, but it does not end there. The disciples need to be taught about God’s Word. Jesus approached disciples and invited them to follow Him. Only when they made the decision to follow Him, did He teach them about the Kingdom of God. Teaching is a vital task in the church. Correct teaching; be it in the form of Bible study or sermons, guards against heresy and so preserves the Gospel as the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God.

Making a decision to follow Jesus is not the only step. Could this be the problem in many churches? Once a person has ‘made a commitment’ the church often relaxes and we count them as a Christian. A Christian continues to follow and grow in God. Growth cannot take place without food: the teaching of the Gospel.

The lack of adequate teaching may be the key to the lack of growth in churches. Churches generally grow by transfer from other churches, and not usually from new converts. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in first-world churches. In the Western church, people appear to be drawn to the most popular church in town. Invariably this may be due to the programs that are followed there or the music that attracts the younger generation. Once a church starts attracting members from other churches, it grows. This lulls us in to a false sense of security. It is not the

²⁵⁷ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

Gospel spreading in the town, just a movement of people from one church to another. True growth of a church is when new blood is brought into the church in the form of new converts. Gary Althorp says, “The Body of Christ suffers today because we have a gospel that has removed the trauma of the Cross, focussing upon easy believism which cheapens Grace.”²⁵⁸ He goes further saying that the gospel is used to entertain rather than slay men. This gospel also amuses rather than condemns those sitting in the church.

In China the growth the church experiences, even if they are house churches, is through conversion growth. In one incident in 1995 Tony Lambert spoke to a pastor of a church of six or seven thousand. When the pastor was asked how many people had converted so far that year, the reply was, “About 1 100 have been converted, baptised and added to our church this year.”²⁵⁹ We have mentioned that teaching of the Gospel is taken seriously in the house church situation in Asia. This could be the reason for the people feeling the confidence to reach out to others and bring the Gospel to them outside of the church/house church. In other words, with enough confidence in what they have been taught, people will reach out more and bring the Gospel onto the streets and not merely invite people to church – a rather passive way of approaching the Great Commission.

Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20 that we are to observe everything that He has commanded us. We can only do this by truly looking at God’s Word and understanding it. This understanding of the Word should also be taught with relevance for today. Application of the Word is what discipleship is about.

²⁵⁸ Gary Althorp, *The Devil’s Playground: The Church* (Singapore: Kings Publications, 1997), 13

²⁵⁹ Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 22,35

Therefore teaching and discipleship should be seen as necessary for church growth and the completion of the Great Commission.

I will consider the importance of teaching in the New Life City Church as a means by which they feel confident enough to reach out, outside of the walls of the church and in so doing become a wall-less church with the goal of helping to complete the Great Commission.

3.14 "I am with you always"

Jesus promised to be with us always in Matthew 28:18-20 when He gave the command to carry out the Great commission. He has never forsaken His people, the church. The unity Jesus speaks of here is a comfort to the church. We know that Jesus will lead the church, disciples and the teaching of the Word in the present church age.

The unity He (Jesus) speaks of in the Book of John is reflected in His prayer to His Father in John 17. Jesus stressed that He never did anything unless He had seen the Father do it. This is why the teaching of the Word is so important. Jesus is with His church. John 17:20-23 suggests that Jesus envisioned the church as a dynamic organism consisting of disciples in unity, under one Head, Jesus. The church is then seen as a group of Christians who can receive correction from one another in humility. This suggests transparent authority.

We cannot know the will of God unless we spend time in prayer as well as studying the Word. Ed Silvoso said, "... Could it be that prayer was the primary vehicle used to reach entire cities for Christ? I suggest that prayer – this kind of prayer – is THE key

to the successful fulfilment of the Great Commission, then and now.”²⁶⁰ Ed Silvano has also suggested 4 elements that the lifestyle of the apostles consisted of: “The study of the doctrine of the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.”²⁶¹ These four elements are what Ed Silvano believes to have been carried out continually by the early church.

In the light of the above statement, this is what a wall-less church could look like. A wall-less church will be an active Christian movement aimed at completing the Great Commission by moving outside the confines of the walls of the church. In this sense, the church will gain momentum and so complete the Great Commission.

George Eldon Ladd suggests that Paul reported back to the congregation in Antioch that he was sent out from, but he never took orders from this congregation. Rather, Paul’s mission was autonomous and had the authority of a ‘travelling congregation.’²⁶² I believe this ‘travelling congregation’ is suggestive of a wall-less church. Paul accomplished much through the power of God as he travelled in the country. Surely the command to carry out the Great Commission still holds good for the church today.

The Gospel speaks continually about the coming of the kingdom of God. Continual warnings throughout the Book make one realise that the church as well as the

²⁶⁰ Ed Silvano, “Prayer Evangelism” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 154

²⁶¹ Ed Silvano, “Prayer Evangelism”, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 154

²⁶² George Eldon Ladd, “The Gospel of the Kingdom” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 224

individual have a role to play in the spreading of the Gospel and so completing the Great Commission. The church could be seen as a kingdom instrument.

According to Wolfgang Simson, it is time to change the superstructure of the church.

He said:

In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church.... adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament,The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel, but left the outer forms of the “church” remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptised it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody had really changed the superstructure. It is about time to do just that.²⁶³

In the light of Simson’s comment we realise what the church of the New Testament is missing – that is, the house churches that existed during the early stages after Pentecost. Could this be the key to changing the superstructure of the church? We need to bear this in mind when we take a closer look at the house church phenomenon later in this chapter.

Jesus reminded us continually that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. Most Christians firmly believe that we are living in the end times. I believe that the church needs to become wall-less and mobile in order to be persecution-proof in these end

²⁶³ Wolfgang Simson, *15 Theses toward Reformation*, <http://www.revivalschool.com> (accessed July 2005).

times. The spreading of the Gospel can never depend on churches sending missionaries or committees deciding to enter certain areas. Committees may often dampen the missionary spirit within its members.

The spreading of the Gospel needs to be led by the Spirit by those who are living by the Spirit. The Spirit in church or in house churches can lead us, but we need to get to the point where we are far more mobile and outward-reaching. Churches should not count growth as merely the addition of members to its structured church services, but rather the spreading of the Word of God as ordered by Jesus in the Great Commission. This will truly be the 'travelling congregation' seen in Paul's time. For instance if we look at Acts 18 we have an account of Paul going to places (went from Athens to Corinth), staying a while and meeting people from yet other places (Aquila from Italy, Silas and Timothy from Macedonia) and so the networking into new areas progressed. Jesus walked to different areas with His band of disciples, teaching them and also spreading God's Word to those who would not normally have heard it. Is this not what the Great Commission is about, where every Christian has a Godly calling? If that is so, how can the church change to become wall-less and outward reaching?

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 "...I will build my church..." Jesus was speaking of building His people into a place where the Spirit of the Living God inhabits them. Being inhabited by the living God is a position of walking in the Spirit, being built up by spiritual growth and being mobile and caring for those who do not yet know

Jesus. Romans 8:14 states that, “Those that are led by the Spirit of God ARE the sons of God.” (My emphasis added).²⁶⁴

Ezekiel 5:5 states, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the centre of the nations, with countries around her.’”²⁶⁵

Jerusalem happens to be at the crossroads to Europe, Asia and Africa. Generally the flame of the Gospel has moved westward from Jerusalem. The fire of the Gospel needs to complete its circuit of the whole globe and then the Lord will return. The last section of this journey is essentially the vision of the Chinese church to take the Gospel back to Jerusalem, commonly known as the Back to Jerusalem Movement.²⁶⁶

Matthew 24:14 says, “This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then the end shall come.”²⁶⁷ We see that Luke 24:46-48 continues on a similar note saying: “This is what is written. The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name in all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. YOU are witnesses to these things.”²⁶⁸

We have enough Biblical evidence to suggest that every Christian has been called to take the Gospel message out into the world. The world of a particular believer may be small, such as in a village, or it could be worldwide. The invitation remains that we have all been called to be witnesses of the salvation message of Jesus.

²⁶⁴ *Amplified Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶⁶ *Back to Jerusalem Movement*. <http://www.backtojerusalem.com> for more information.

²⁶⁷ *Amplified Bible*, (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*

We have seen from the above study that the early church was most successful in outreach in spite of lack of funds and facilities. They met in homes, evangelised families and then villages. In the light of this fact, it is important that we turn our attention to the Chinese house churches – apparently the fastest growing Christian sector in the world today. Wang and Chan have suggested that China’s economy will match that of the United States by 2020 and it will be a super-power by 2030. In the light of this statement, we realise that a Christian China can influence the world positively. It is estimated that 85% of Christians in China attend house churches.²⁶⁹ In the light of the perceived influence of the Chinese house churches, we need to consider them in more depth.

3.15 House or home churches

We have noticed from the above study on the Biblical understanding of the Great Commission that when the early church started, it grew dramatically. Of note is the situation that the early church met in homes. In the light of this, it is important for us at this stage of the research to mention that some of the fastest growing churches in the world are in fact the house churches, especially in China. It is important for us to take a close look at these house churches in the light of the Great Commission message.

The 1970’s showed several large house church groupings consisting of mostly semi-literate rural believers. These house church groups have expanded into national

²⁶⁹ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, “Christian Witness to the Chinese” in *Perspectives in the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition. Ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 644-645

networks of several million believers.²⁷⁰ A possible house church figure could be 80 million believers.²⁷¹

The Chinese culture is known for its reverence for the older generation. We see this where the older generation is not easily put into aged care facilities, but are kept within the family network. Several generations live in one home and the 'elders' are seen as wise and to be revered (where 'elders' refers to older generations). When the 'elders' come to salvation, usually the whole family follows soon afterwards.

Chua Wee Hian's point refers to Chinese society stressing the importance of security within the family unit. A Confucian teaching stresses the importance of relationship with family ties. Anyone outside the family trying to bring foreign teaching to an individual within the family unit will be regarded with suspicion. In other words, the Gospel should be brought to the family unit and not to the individual to be most effective.²⁷²

James W. Gustafson refers to families within a community getting to know about Jesus. In this way, the Gospel expands spontaneously as people share the Gospel with their families.²⁷³ The older members of the families are respected for their wisdom and choices. The elders invite the rest of the household to church services, whether they are in actual church buildings or house churches. In this study we need

²⁷⁰ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (United Kingdom: Monarch Books, 2006), 65

²⁷¹ Lambert, *China's Millions*, 68

²⁷² Chua Wee Hian, "Evangelization of Whole Families" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 614

²⁷³ James W. Gustafson, "Pigs, Ponds and the Gospel" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 678

to see how these house churches operate in order to be as effective as they are at present.

One can receive some insight as to the extent of the house church situation in China in the following comment from Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan: "...house churches now are no longer a loose body. They are organized in terms of large groups much like denominations in the West, with several thousand or several million members, structured by country, prefecture, provincial and national levels to oversee the operations of hundreds, even thousands of house churches."²⁷⁴

The house church groups feel that they have the calling by Christ, to take the Gospel westward, back to Jerusalem. In China, this desire to spread the Gospel through the strongholds of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism westward, towards Jerusalem is known as the *Back to Jerusalem Movement*.²⁷⁵ These Christians have the desire to see the completion of the Great commission. The Great Commission, they believe, needs to go full circle until it reaches Jerusalem again, where it left off two thousand years ago.

When Asian (and most specifically Chinese) house churches are observed, it seems the following factors are prevalent:

²⁷⁴ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, "Christian Witness to the Chinese" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement 3rd*, ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, ed. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 643

²⁷⁵ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 19

i) - Members of the house church are a close-knit group because of their size. House churches are organised into larger groups of several thousand to several million members.²⁷⁶

ii) - Members are expected to play an active role in the group; hence they are disciplined carefully in order to carry out further evangelism. Evangelism is seen as sharing their newfound faith with others in their daily lives; it is not a planned activity by the group as a whole. Mission is classified into two categories- primary mission or person-to-person mission and secondary mission aiming at forming an atmosphere conducive for the Christians to witness in a non-Christian community.²⁷⁷

iii) - All members of the group are taught that Jesus has given them the authority to bring the gospel to others.²⁷⁸

iv) - Through Bible teaching within the house groups, members are taught sound principles and doctrines that aim at equipping them to effectively avoid heresies. Intense hunger for God's Word is seen in believers walking many miles to hear the Bible read. Many older members have memorized large sections of Scripture because they have never had a Bible or are illiterate. Lambert mentions the "Union" version of the Bible as the most used version. This has apparently helped to keep unity – doctrinally and spiritually. Lambert feels that the centrality of the Scriptures

²⁷⁶ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, "Christian Witness to the Chinese" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 643

²⁷⁷ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, "Christian Witness to the Chinese" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 643

²⁷⁸ David Wang, *Asia's Maturing Church*, <http://www.pastornet.au/renewal/journal2/wang.html> (accessed 15 February 2006). In this interview Wang mentioned that the Asian church had moved from a "missionary-receiving" church to a "missionary-sending" church as they realise their responsibility to shoulder the Great Commission with the Western church.

has been lost in the Western church. He said: "...there will never be revival in the West without a wholehearted return to the Bible as the sole standard of faith and practice."²⁷⁹

v) - All members are expected to know the workings of the Holy Spirit and to walk with the power of the Spirit wherever they go. They expect signs and wonders to follow them as in the time of the Book of Acts. Paul Hattaway said that over 80% of believers came to know Jesus because they had received miraculous healing or deliverance from God.²⁸⁰

vi) - The house churches are safer – especially in persecuted areas. House churches can disperse easily when they come under attack. The house church members are taught the scripture, 2 Timothy 3:12 "...those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Brother Yun mentions that God has refined the believers and their methods. The house churches are committed to planting more groups in homes and have never sought to build church buildings. They believe that they are harder to detect (by the authorities) in house churches. They also believe that they will not waste money on buildings, but rather use it to spread the Gospel.²⁸¹

vii) - Members feel that they can easily reach out to potential Christians. The members know that prayer from their fellows undergirds them, as intercession is made for their progress to those who do not know the Gospel.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (United Kingdom: Monarch Books, 2006), 210-211

²⁸⁰ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 123

²⁸¹ Paul Hattaway and Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man* (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, Monarch Books, 2004), 288

²⁸² Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem*, 119

viii) - All house churches are independent/autonomous and able to reach out to others without going through hierarchical channels and red tape.²⁸³

ix) - All Christians understand the authority Jesus has given them – to reach out to others and to expect the miraculous. Paul Hattaway has seen that many Chinese living overseas have received the call of God to take the Gospel back to Jerusalem. They miraculously have the same vision that the Mainland Chinese received from God.²⁸⁴

x) - It appears as if the house church members understand the authority Christ gave better than organized church members. Brother Yun explains that every house church pastor in China is prepared to lay down his/her life for the Gospel. He goes further to say that when the pastor lives this way, and then God does great things.²⁸⁵

Lives are transformed and the authority of the Gospel is displayed. Tony Lambert explains that the church growth movement in China sees “...authority of the Bible is taken for granted as a divinely given axiom.”²⁸⁶

Denny Kenaston mentioned the following comment of Brother Paul during an interview on Chinese House Churches.

The Great Commission cannot be compromised. Their methods are anointed preaching with signs following. The leaders instruct the evangelism teams to go to a new village and inquire about the worst problem in the village. Then

²⁸³ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 58-59

²⁸⁴ Paul Hattaway et al, *Back to Jerusalem*, (United Kingdom: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 117, 131

²⁸⁵ Paul Hattaway & Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man* (Michigan: London & Grand Rapids, Mill Hill, 2004), 300

²⁸⁶ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 22

they are to go and minister to that problem and show that Jesus is the all-powerful Saviour...²⁸⁷

Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan state the following interesting fact:

...since 1949 there are 57 million so-called “overseas” Chinese (including 21 million in Taiwan) scattered in more than 60 countries around the world. God has seen fit to work among them in different patterns, placing them in positions of leadership in academic, professional and business fields...God has also made them receptive to the Christian message. By 1998 there were at least 8,000 Chinese churches in more than 50 countries of the world.²⁸⁸

Wang and Chan have a further interesting comment to make in the following statement. “Among these evangelical Christians, many felt that they were being prepared for a SIGNIFICANT ROLE in God’s Kingdom in the days ahead, especially the EVANGELIZATION of the Chinese in their HOMELAND.” (My emphasis added).²⁸⁹

Wang and Chan estimate that about half a million China scholars are overseas at any one given time. The impact of evangelising these scholars so that they can take the Gospel back home to their families is immense. One can only imagine the impact these returning scholars will have on the Chinese mainland.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Denny Kenaston, The Radical Chinese House Churches. Email of the interview received from anzacwelovegod.org in 2005.

²⁸⁸ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, “Christian Witness to the Chinese” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* 3rd Edition, ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 641

²⁸⁹ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, “Christian Witness to the Chinese, Ibid, 641

²⁹⁰ Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, “Christian Witness to the Chinese”, Ibid, 644

I believe that this is a significant comment to make in the light of what I have witnessed in the NLCC and their outreach back to the homeland. This phenomenon will be studied in greater detail in a later chapter.

3.16 Summary

In the light of the above study on the Great Commission, we can come to the conclusion that Jesus has given us everything we need in order to complete the Great Commission. In other words, every Christian, and for that matter the corporate body of Christ has been equipped to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The authority of Christ has been given and with it the power. Nobody should be lost into eternal damnation. It appears that, had the church taken the Great Commission order seriously from the start, the Gospel should have reached across the globe, all the way back to Jerusalem by now. Carey urged the church to take the Great Commission seriously in his article, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. He regarded the Great Commission as an order to all Christians.²⁹¹ Townsend also confirms Carey's view in *Tribes, Tongues and Translators*.²⁹² Taylor's *Call to Service* also suggests the Great Commission is God's plan to 'go and do' while trusting Him.²⁹³ Mc Gavran's article, *Bridges of God*, says, "Peoples become Christians where a Christward movement occurs within that society."²⁹⁴ These comments suggest that the Gospel has to move to the people in the area where they live, therefore the Gospel must move out from the churches for the Great Commission to be completed.

²⁹¹ William Carey, "An Enquiry" in *Perspectives in the World Christian Movement 3rd* Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 293-299

²⁹² Cameron Townsend, "Tribes, Tongues and Translators," *Ibid*, 309

²⁹³ J. Hudson Taylor, "The Call to Service," *Ibid*, 300-304

²⁹⁴ Donald A McGavran, "The Bridges of God," *Ibid*, 324

It has been important to include this chapter on the Great Commission to show how Jesus intended the Gospel to be spread. We have also seen that the house churches, especially in Asia, grow the way that Jesus expected. Now we can study the NLCC and see how these concepts can work within a church in a Western setting. How is the NLCC using these concepts with positive results? Now we can proceed to study the NLCC and see how the Great Commission has been implemented with success.

The NLCC will be studied as a wall-less and outwardly mobile church that takes the Great Commission order of Jesus seriously. I will study the different aspects of the life and worship of the congregants in order to understand the wall-less concept better and find possible ways of implementing this in other churches. We should take Jesus order seriously, lest the Great Commission becomes the Great Compromise.

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDER MEMBERS OF THE NEW LIFE CITY CHURCH

The researcher deemed it necessary to study the founder members of the New Life City Church in order to understand what motivated a group of Asian Christians to start a church in Perth. The questions the researcher needed to ask were:

- Were there no churches in Perth to cater for the needs of the Asian Christian? If this is so, what are those needs?

- Are the churches in the west and Perth in particular so different from the churches in Asia that the Asian Christian felt ill at ease? If there are dramatic differences, then what are these differences?

4.1 The founding of the NLCC

The following background information on the NLCC was gleaned during the course of the interviews with the founder members. The founder members are all still presently active members in the NLCC. The New Life City Church in Perth started eight years ago by a handful of Christians. This church has grown steadily over the years to the present membership of 200. This in itself does not appear to be a wonderful achievement. However, we see an interesting phenomenon when we realise that the New Life City Church (NLCC) is bigger outside of its four walls in the way most people would understand the meaning of the word, church. I will expand on the NLCC's understanding of church later in this chapter. NLCC started as an

outreach post for Asian people who were new to Perth or had not found their niche in one of the other churches in Perth. The initial goal was to have a point of outreach for Asians in the Western suburbs of Perth. The founder members realised that the need also existed for an outreach to the Asian student population at the University of Western Australia in Perth.

Many Asian students come to study in Perth, only to return to their own country on the completion of their studies. The founder members of NLCC realised that these students were open to the Gospel as they were so far from family and other support groups. They felt they could meet the spiritual needs of these students. The NLCC then began to appear 'wall-less' in the sense that Christians attending the NLCC are sent out to evangelise Asia, on completion of their studies. It should be mentioned that many church members are permanently resident in Australia and go on mission several times a year. They believe that God has called them to complete the Great Commission. Historically, the Gospel has always gone in a westward direction from Jerusalem and later southwards, now the circle back to Jerusalem needs to be completed.²⁹⁵ We need to look at how the Asians feel about their calling in God to complete the Great Commission all the way back to Jerusalem.

4.2 Background to interviews of founder members

In order to understand this unique calling of God, the founding members of the church were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a group of six of the founder members. Initially questions were sent via email in order for them to

²⁹⁵ The Gospel had spread in a westward direction since the start of the early church. The Chinese church wants to take the Gospel full circle, in the direction of Jerusalem, through all the strongholds of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

formulate their answers before they were interviewed at a combined cell meeting. Time was set aside to discuss their answers and to clarify some of their responses. All of the subsequent discussions were on an individual basis after church services on a Sunday. Members were willing to participate in all discussions and interviews, as they are passionate about God and His calling on their lives.

The aim of the discussions with founder members was to gauge how the Asians experience Christianity in a Western setting and how they understand God, prayer, mission, church growth and general outreach? The aim was to understand the motivation behind a small band of passionate Christians who felt they could evangelise Perth and Asia for Jesus.

4.3 The aim of interview questions

The questions needed to answer several levels of inquiry. The first level of inquiry is on a spiritual level, in other words, their understanding of God, prayer and mission outreach. The second level of inquiry was how they felt about Christianity in a Western setting and whether the Western church had not answered their needs spiritually and socially. This level of inquiry would aim to answer how Asians perceive the church and church growth. The third level of inquiry was to capture their role in a wall-less church and how they perceive the Great Commission order of Jesus, while the fourth level of inquiry was to detect how a small group of Christians could mature to the point of raising enough funds to call a pastor from one of the largest churches in Singapore as their minister/leader.

4.4 Interviews with the founder members of NLCC

Six founder members were interviewed. These six founder members are the original six members who started NLCC. All six founder members are first-generation Christians. They all highlight the fact that most of first-generation Christians were introduced to Christianity through friends while at university or by being invited to fellowship, such as the men's breakfast. The interviewees explained that it is an Asian custom to invite people for a meal in order to get to know them better.

It is interesting to notice that that they feel that first-generation Christians appear to have the desire to reach out to all people soon after the salvation experience.

During the course of the interviews the founder members expressed concern that possibly the constraints of a church often keep people from evangelising or reaching out. The interviewees feel that it appears as if newborn Christians who attend more traditional churches appear to settle into the church first. They feel that this process, in effect, subdues that initial feeling of euphoria and the desire to tell everyone about their experience in Christ. It seems as though wall-less churches such as this, that love to share salvation experiences through worship and in various cell groups, allow for a climate more conducive to outreach by new Christians to develop. The new Christian then accepts that it is normal to share and evangelise.

Most of the founder members were attending various churches in Perth, but met every Saturday for Bible studies for several months. They felt that the churches were not getting 'into the Word' as much as they desired. By this they meant that the church was not preaching heavily on the Word of God and encouraging them to seek

further in the Word. A fellow Asian pastor stood in for a short period as honorary pastor although he had a congregation across the city.

The initial group became known as the Genesis Fellowship. All founder members remember this time with great fondness and stressed how the teaching of the Word was as important as the fellowship with one another. Interestingly, most members of this group had a chance to be leader. Most referred to this stage as 'leadership by default'. They all felt that the opportunity to lead and prepare Bible studies made them realise that they can 'do all things through Christ who strengthens them' as seen in Philippians 4:13. The leadership opportunities appear to have been growth opportunities for all concerned. The growth referred to was spiritual as well as social. This leads one to conclude that new Christians should be encouraged to share their faith and in this way, they realise that they are of value to the Body of Christ. This initial sharing of their faith will be the first steps to completing the Great Commission as Jesus ordered.

The founder group members had their spouses involved. This is intriguing in the sense that wives are seen as part of the team. From a previous chapter we can remember that the Asian is family oriented and wives have a huge input in the daily running of the family. It is interesting that this concept has been drawn into the founder group of the church.

4.4.1 The Genesis group

The founders had a specific vision for the Genesis group. The question on vision was answered as follows:

All the members felt that they wanted to get into God's Word 'seriously'. The general consensus is that a smaller group studying the Bible together gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions. The honorary pastor could answer these the next time they met. The desire of the first-generation Christian to get to know God by getting to know His Word is commendable. This comment answers one of the initial questions raised in this study – the question of whether first-generation Christians grow more quickly in a smaller group than in a more traditional church setting.

4.4.2 Fervent prayer

All founder members felt the urge for fervent prayer. They felt that prayer was as important as getting to know the Word. All of the first-generation Christians felt that prayer leads one to get to know God as Father. The interviewees also all felt that it was imperative to ask God to show His plan for the group. Prayer and fasting was part of the pattern of the group in getting to know God's desire for the future of the group. This is discussed in detail later.

4.4.3 Holy Spirit led

All of the founder members interviewed felt that the Holy Spirit was the true leader of the Genesis group and that it was God's plan for the NLCC to grow from the initial group. All members felt comfortable with the progression from Genesis Fellowship to NLCC as part of God's divine plan.

4.4.4 Care group

All founder members in the group also saw Genesis Fellowship as a care group to meet specific needs. They saw the need to care for young Asian students who were in Perth for study. The students were a vulnerable group who needed understanding and somebody who could identify with their culture. The Asian is family oriented and the students see the NLCC as an extension of their family/ or their Perth family. All the founder members had children of their own who were at university or high school age; hence they had a heart for this outreach.

4.4.5 Understanding God

In understanding the NLCC as a wall-less church, the question to be asked is how the Asian understands God. Their answers were as follows:

- i) - "God is Abba Father and so we talk to Him and have a relationship with Him. The more we talk to Him, the closer our relationship becomes as it would in the natural with our earthly fathers."
- ii) - "God is our loving Father – filled with mercy and grace for mere humans. This humbles me. I fear nobody but God."
- iii) - "God is graceful and ever-living."
- iv) - "God is King. I answer to Him first."
- v) - "God is all powerful. His will is divine and I must humble myself."
- vi) - "God is Lord of all, in every aspect of my life."

The responses of the entire founder group showed absolute reverence for God. In the discussions all stressed that God is first in their lives and they answer to Him first. They put His will first and all other aspects of life fall into place according to His will.

The whole group, without reservation, agreed that salvation brings them to their knees before Jesus in repentance. Repentance brings them to face God as Father.

Reverence for God and awe at His greatness were strongly stressed by all founder members. To 'fear God' is not understood as being scared of God. Fear of God is understood to mean trusting God as the King and Lord of all, who knows best His plans that He has for each member and the group as a whole. The understanding of God that impacted the most in the discussion is the fact that they see every aspect of their lives – including all secular activity as secondary to their relationship with God. His will is first in their lives, hence the healthy prayer life. It became apparent that few if any decisions are made without prayerful consideration. God is truly Lord of their lives. For the Western mind, this aspect seemed to be the most pertinent.

4.4.6 Understanding the importance of prayer

The founder members understanding of prayer was equally interesting. The entire group suggested that prayer is vital in ALL THINGS at ALL TIMES. All members felt that intimacy with God, in prayer, was a vital aspect of the Christian faith. A relationship with God is not possible without intimacy in prayer. All the members spent time in prayer daily. All members felt that specific prayers for specific needs of the group needed corporate intercession. Once again, all the founder members suggested that prayer "fuels the passion for God and His glory to be seen throughout

all the earth.” This comment brings the desire to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth to the fore. The desire to complete the Great Commission is not seen as another way of growing the church only; they see it as a desire from God for all people to be saved. Another example of the importance of prayer was illustrated when asked how they came to appoint the present pastor. The most poignant comment was, “the decision to appoint a pastor was a leadership decision bathed in prayer.”

4.4.7 Appointing a pastor – the motivation

The decision to appoint the pastor was discussed with the founder members. The comments were varied but show a general pattern. All founder members are professional people (mostly in the medical field) and felt that their professional lives left little time to prepare Bible studies and messages/sermons to a larger group. At this time the Genesis group had begun to grow and many hungry new Christians needed to be fed. The founder members felt that good pastoral care was necessary to take care of the ‘new-born Christians’. The consensus was that they were not available as much as they felt the new Christians needed them and so were failing God.

The founder members themselves all stated that they had a great hunger for more in-depth teaching. No founder member had the spiritual maturity and knowledge to impart further wisdom. They felt that as the New Testament church had overseers preaching in the new churches, so an overseer was desirable for the group. In other words, a pastor was needed to meet the growing group’s needs.

The need to appoint a pastor was referred to by the majority of the group as a desire instilled by God. The whole group of the founder members interviewed, see the pastor as a 'man sent by God'. They all stressed that the decision was not taken lightly. Prayer and fasting and calling out to God for the right person to lead, shaped the prayers of the time. This period is fondly referred to as 'seeking God's face to move His hand to send us His anointed servant.'

The question of how they financed the pastor to come to this group was answered in an interesting way. They all felt that God had put the desire into their hearts to call a pastor. They had sought God about His anointed servant – therefore God would provide the finances. There was never any doubt in their mind that God provides for that which is His will. The founder members stressed that God has never let them down.

The faith of the initial founder members is demonstrated in that they felt God had led them to appoint a pastor from one of the biggest churches in Singapore. They never doubted that he would come, because they knew God's will for NLCC.

It is refreshing to see faith in action in this way, rather than balancing books and trying to strike a deal with somebody that may be good for church leadership. Often the founder members refer to the pastor as 'the one God sent to us'.

4.4.8 Outreach to Perth and Asia

The question of outreach to Perth City and Asia provided interesting answers.

I wanted to understand how the founder members perceived outreach to the two areas in question. Would outreach into Perth be seen differently to outreach to Asia. The following answers explain the founder members understanding of outreach.

- i) - 'We stand as witnesses where God places us.'
- ii) - 'We see outreach into the greater Perth and Asia as achievable, realistic and we are ready to do our bit in the Calling.'
- iii) - 'We go where He sends us. We wait for the infilling of the Spirit and therefore we are anointed for outreach with love. We expect miracles because that is how God manifests His anointing.'
- iv) - 'Perth and Asia are equal in importance for outreach. God places us in Perth for a reason, to reach out to the lost. When we go to Asia we take God's life giving message with us, because it is what gives us life. We are anxious to share it with others, because it is God's desire that not a single soul is lost.'
- v) - 'Jesus gave us the Great Commission – we need to heed it. We cannot take from the Bible what suits us and ignore the rest. We need to answer to God – how will we do this if we ignore His love message to the world.'
- vi) - 'Often the new Christian student is more effective in outreach in Perth because he can identify with the lost. When the new Christians mature in faith, they are able to answer the questions their families ask when they get back to Asia. A family member who has changed for the better and shows the fruit of the Spirit is the most effective witness to the people in Asia.'

Throughout the discussion, outreach in Perth and Asia were seen as equally important. The founder members stressed that all people need to witness wherever God has placed them. They felt an individual calling through the Scriptures to complete the Great Commission. They appeared to find it incredulous that many Christians would take many aspects of the Scriptures and apply it to their lives, but have never thought that Jesus has called them out as witnesses.

All of the founder members felt that it is vital to know the Bible well. Word knowledge is imperative to being a good witness. Additionally they all felt that every believer has a message or testimony that is powerful in its effect.

The question of testimony could be one of the differences between how the Asian Christians see their role in the church and how Western Christians do. The reason for this remark is that every person in NLCC has a testimony that they share at some stage in the church. This method was started by the founder members who shared their testimonies to invite new people to the group or church. The Asian Christians update their testimony often because it can change often as they grow in God.

Much joy is shared in church as testimonies are shared. As a participant observer I have witnessed great encouragement by the rest of the group when somebody testifies.

This is the up-building and edification of the church spoken about in the Gospel. In this way, the interviewees feel that everyone is encouraged to believe that they make a difference in life when they share the Gospel. Testimony sharing is not strictly kept for church activity. All are encouraged to share their testimonies outside the church building in secular society, thereby becoming a wall-less church.

The testimony and the Word are taken out into society and become a natural progression of sharing the faith. The sharing of faith is often referred to in the church as “The Way”.

Now we can understand that testimony and the Word together means to witness. To witness for the Lord means to take the Great Commission seriously. Testimony sharing is seen as fishing for disciples to come and share in “The Way”. As the founder members testified in the beginning to bring others to Christ, so the greater NLCC testifies to grow and reach the ends of the earth and bring the Gospel back to Jerusalem.

4.4.9 What is understood by ‘church’?

When the founder members were interviewed on how they see or experience church, the answers were varied. The following are some of the responses:

- i) - ‘Church is ME on a journey to bring others to a saving knowledge of Jesus.’
- ii) - ‘Church is the world wide group of believers.’
- iii) - ‘Church is every believer but, corporately, it is a platform for ministry and outreach.’
- iv) - ‘Church is all ages of believers actively worshipping God in celebration every day of their lives. This celebration of God is the greatest witness to a lost, secular world.’
- v) - ‘Church is a corporate group of believers. It is a journey and not a destination.’
- vi) - ‘Church is believers bringing glory to God until Jesus comes; it is the Bride Jesus will fetch.’

Not a single founder member mentioned that the church is a building, but rather, church is seen as believers. The whole group saw church as a worldwide group of believers. The church was never mentioned in the understanding of denominationalism. Church is seen as a body of believers who are therefore the visible body of Christ on earth until the second coming of our Lord. The founder members see the body as worldwide. In all comments on the church, they identified with believers all over the world.

In observation, we notice that age is never mentioned in decided categories. NLCC is characterised by whole families attending church. Those without family in the church are international students. All of the founder members interviewed feel that the youth (16-25 years old) have as much say in the corporate body as anyone else.

4.4.10 Ministry and outreach

As a noteworthy sidenote: many saw the church as a platform for ministry and outreach. The observer can sense that the whole church stands with the pastor and values his input as a servant of God. The pastor and eldership are not the only people who decide on outreach and mission. The whole church appears to be included in praying for certain areas before an outreach team is sent into the mission field. This has the effect that the whole corporate church feels part of the decision making. All Christians need to feel relevant in the church. Even young Christians have their opinions valued. The founder members have always stressed that God can speak and work through young Christians too. I believe that this factor has encouraged many young Christians to mature more quickly. Everyone can see that all prayers are important to the carrying out of any outreach campaign.

4.4.11 What is understood by growth?

In the interviews the founder members were asked how they understood 'growth'.

The following are some of the responses:

- i) - 'Growth is to love others and bring them into fellowship with believers.'
- ii) - 'Growth is moving forward together in fellowship.'
- iii) - 'Growth means meeting together to share the gospel. Sharing brings forth fruit'
- iv) - 'Growth starts with YOU.'
- v) - 'Growth is from God. We plant and others may reap. The Word is paramount to feeding the flock'
- vi) - 'Growth means an increase in converts, an increase in fellowshipping and above all, an increase in love'

Church growth is understood differently by the Asian Christians. All of the founder members responses understood growth to be the growth of the individual in their walk with God. This growth or maturity of the Christian will bring forth fruit where more converts are brought to fellowship BECAUSE of the spiritual growth of an individual. In other words, when Christians mature, their lives speak about Christ and so others are drawn into the fellowship. The question of church numbers never came up in this response. When asked about church numbers, the response was that conversion growth was the best growth because it is vibrant and changes many lives.

4.4.12 The Great Commission as understood by the NLCC founder members

The founder members' understanding of the Great Commission sheds further light on the subject of church growth. Here are some of the responses during the interviews:

- i) - 'We are all witnesses of God's grace and mercy and riches and glory.'
- ii) - 'The Great Commission is a tool God has raised. We should heed the order.'
- iii) - 'The Great Commission is vital all over the world to every Christian and church body.'
- iv) - 'We are all responsible for the completion of the Great Commission. We pray for God's Kingdom to come, it cannot come until all nations are told about God's grace and mercy.'
- v) - 'The Great Commission is a way of life. We need to take every word seriously in the Bible. There is no such thing as selective Christianity.'
- vi) - 'Every Christian must answer to God about their role in the Great Commission. The Great Commission must be a way of life for every Christian.'

The question of the Great Commission brought a heated response. The NLCC founder members felt that all Christians will be judged if they practice selective Christianity. Every scriptural word has great effect and none should be left out. The fact that Jesus told us not to add to or subtract from His Word was mentioned.

The founder members felt that every Christian must take responsibility to bring others to salvation – it is never exclusively the pastor's duty. They came to the

conclusion that no church would exist if somebody did not heed God and start an outreach or fellowship. It was felt that churches grow by God's divine plan and not man's plans.

The founder members felt that the Great Commission is a huge order that can only be carried out when every Christian plays an active role. Every founder member had been instrumental in leading somebody to salvation. As we have seen in a previous chapter, this cannot be said of Western Christians in general. A comment was made that maybe God has chosen the Chinese to take the Gospel back to Jerusalem because they are the largest people group on earth. Further, they are also the poorest as far as church buildings and other worldly possessions go. They felt that maybe God would have given this task to the Chinese because nothing is holding them back from building large churches and beautifying their surroundings. They have a burning desire to see the Gospel spread, not a building glorified.

4.4.13 Spiritual gifts in the church

When questioned about the part that spiritual gifts play in the church, we can deduce from the responses of the founder members that spiritual gifts also play a role in the desire to complete the Great Commission. Founder members were questioned on their understanding of spiritual gifts. By spiritual gifts we mean the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14.

These gifts include –

-Word of wisdom, word of knowledge and prophecy.

-Working miracles, gifts of healing and gift of faith.

-Speaking in tongues, discernment of spirits and interpretation of tongues.

The following are responses on the understanding of the founder members about spiritual gifts and their use in the church.

i) - 'God equips; gifts are essential and God provides grace for their use.'

ii) - 'Word and Spirit go hand in hand. Word and spiritual empowerment go together.'

iii) - 'Spiritual gifts must be used as God desires. With every gift comes responsibility.'

iv) - 'All Christians have potential in God through these gifts to meet the need of the greater body of Christ.'

v) - 'Spiritual gift usage should always be encouraged in the Body of Christ. Even in Sunday school, children must know that Jesus said that we would do even greater works than He has done. This is possible when we move forward in faith and trust in God.'

vi) - 'Spiritual gifts are used in order to glorify God. Spiritual gifts are used by God for a purpose, never for entertainment.'

The founder members have great respect for spiritual gifts and feel they should never be taken lightly. God will complete His purposes within the body of Christ when His Word and gifts are taken seriously. The founder members felt that the spiritual gifts of God should be used during any meeting of believers and also individually by Christians within a secular setting. They shared examples of

miraculous healings taking place when Christians have prayed for non-believers and they were healed and turned to God. They also related stories of children praying over pastors and God's glory being seen by all those present.

The founder members felt that as each person has a different spiritual gift, it is important to stay 'within your calling'. By this they mean that each person has a certain calling within the greater Body of Christ. They felt that we are many people making up one body of Christ. Each person has a function within the body. If they fail to use their gift within the body, the body is weakened. They feel that we all need to be obedient to that calling of God.

Age and maturity in the Christian walk did not matter, the point was to heed God and use the gifts as He desires. Fellowshiping within the church was vital for others to pinpoint spiritual gifts, so as to use them correctly. They felt that when they were previously fellowshiping in other churches, their spiritual gifts were often overlooked due to the anonymity in large congregations. This meant that spiritual gifts were often neglected or lay dormant and so maturity could not be reached in the use of these gifts.

In other words, the founder members understood that the gifts of the Spirit edify the whole group as the body of Christ, but that these gifts, when used, build up individual Christians to greater maturity in their walk with God.

The founder members of the NLCC have shed great light on how the Asian understands church, God, the importance of prayer, the use of spiritual gifts and the

role of the Christian in the Great Commission. From the above discussion we can come to the following conclusion.

4.5 Summary

The founder members understand God to be the all-powerful and worthy of being included in every facet of their lives. They see Him as King of their lives and in complete control. They see themselves in relationship with Him in everything that entails their lives. This group show- a great reverence and awe for God. They find it unacceptable to suggest that they would make any decision without waiting for God to show them His will for their lives.

The group feels that church needs to be wall-less in order to have an impact on society. The founder members found that too often the Western church tries to be relevant in society by allowing the world into the church. The Asian Christian understands that the church needs to move into the world. By this it is meant that the church needs to reach out into every sector of society. The church cannot do this unless individual Christians realise that they have a part to play. They all saw themselves as the church individually and corporately. I was surprised to learn that they believed that all ages have an equal function within the church and that everyone, irrespective of age, has been called to reach out to others and so further the Great Commission. I do believe that this factor adds to the wall-less nature of the church as I have seen all age groups actively reaching out to the lost.

The group feels that every Christian needs to be built-up in the Word. This can often only be done in smaller groups where questions can be answered. Individual

Christians need to feel that they can make a difference by telling their testimony to a hurting world. If Jesus can make a difference in his or her life, He can make a difference in everyone's life. No Christian is too young or immature to evangelise. God can work through anyone who is willing to be used to complete the Great Commission.

I found it a surprise that the group saw outreach into Perth and Asia as completely achievable. They truly believe that each person who has a testimony can make a difference in bringing God's Word to the world.

The impact of unity and togetherness of the Asian church family spoke very loudly to me. Every new Christian is embraced as a brother or sister in Christ and nurtured and encouraged. The founder members are not merely a group of Christians studying the Word; they truly put God's word into practice. Taking the Word into the world with love and reverence for God is a mark of a wall-less church.

The group raised the issue about the importance of prayer at all times. Their devotion to pray and wait for God's answer is demonstrated in their approach to appointing the pastor.

Church growth is understood to be individuals maturing in their walk with God. This factor, I believe, is instrumental in understanding how they see the Great Commission to be achievable. The group found that it made sense that each person, as he shares his testimony, matures further each day. However, the sharing of testimony has a two-fold outcome. The individual matures and the individual who hears the testimony begins to become aware of the Gospel. The group said that if

each Christian all over the world shared his testimony with one other person, the Great Commission would be achievable within weeks. This statement made a great impact on me. I realised that many new Christians could suddenly come into the church. How would the church, especially in the post-Christian society, cope with such an influx?

In this chapter we identified certain aspects within the founder member group that they perceived to be vital in their spiritual growth as well as ultimately in the growth of the NLCC. We can identify similar characteristics in Cho's approach to church. Cho mentioned that churches should not depend on a single strong pastor.²⁹⁶ The founder member group had to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and still do in spite of having a pastor today. Cho also mentioned that cell groups give all members an opportunity to participate in ministry within a church.²⁹⁷ The founder group demonstrated that small groups built them up in their knowledge of the Word and its application in everyday life through the encouragement and fellowship of others. Hattaway, as does Cho, emphasised the house church movement's confidence in God's sovereignty and the Lordship of Christ.

Another aspect of the house churches is their emphasis on prayer and their love for the Word.²⁹⁸ These aspects all tie in with the findings in this chapter via founder member interviews. Lambert identified similar character traits in the house church movements of China where the mission of the church is identified as a group of believers who are 'priests' and have the authority and responsibility to preach the

²⁹⁶ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*. (Florida: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), viii

²⁹⁷ Ibid

²⁹⁸ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem* (UK, Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 18-19

gospel using teaching, training and proclaiming.²⁹⁹ MacArthur's identification of shepherding i.e. the need to care for one another and meet the needs of others, as one of the 'muscles' of the church ties in with the founder group's desire to care for international students.³⁰⁰

Damazio identifies certain aspects that he believes are important in a church for it to grow and have authority. These aspects are – the importance of prayer, deep relationships with others in the church to form a family of God, fear/awe of God, Biblical worship and importance of creating a hunger for the Word.³⁰¹ The aspects Damazio identified for the 'gate church' are identifiable in the founder group interviews as aspects that they considered vital for their spiritual growth and ultimately for the growth of the church.

While the above-mentioned authors identified similar aspects within a church that cultivates growth, as did the founder member group, it is unusual for a group of lay people to have identified these aspects while planting a group as they await a minister. I believe that the founder group's desire to spread the Word because of the Great Commission to be identifiable within the Asian Christian culture. However, the founder member group never regarded age in years or age in Christian maturity to prohibit somebody from sharing the Gospel. I have only found this aspect in Cho's church.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Great Britain: Abingdon, Marston Book Services, 2006), 74

³⁰⁰ John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan* (US: Chicago, Moody Press, 1991), 65

³⁰¹ Frank Damazio, *The Gate Church* (Oregon: Portland, City Bible Publishing, 2000), 39,71,80,106,113, and 141.

³⁰² David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (US: Florida, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), 83

The researcher realised that it is important to interview a group of first-generation Christians to see how they experience church and what they considered was important in the encouragement to mature as Christians. In the post-Christian areas, the Western church will come across many first-generation Christians. It is a vital part of this study to find out what encourages first-generation Christians to feel secure and grow within the church. We will consider this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FIRST-GENERATION CHRISTIANS IN THE NEW LIFE CITY CHURCH

A large number of first-generation Christians call New Life City Church (NLCC) their *home church*.³⁰³ I allocated study time to this particular group within the NLCC because I believe that the Western church can learn from the structures the church has put in place to manage or cope with first-generation Christians. This may seem odd in a Western setting, but it is not unusual. This study will explain further.

5.1 *What is a first-generation Christian?*

First-generation Christians are Christians who have never been exposed to the Gospel previously within their homes while growing up. They may also never have heard the Gospel in any form within their community because of the culture in which they grew up. These Christians come to know the Lord from other family members or friends and acquaintances other than their parents. They have usually grown up in a household where other beliefs were practiced. In this thesis the concept 'other beliefs' refers to Buddhists or Freethinkers as will be seen in the discussion to follow.

The first-generation Christian is usually the first of the family to come to salvation through Jesus. These Christians had never been to church or Sunday school while growing up simply because their parents were not Christian or the parents

³⁰³ Home Church – is the church a member considers to be their permanent place of worship in the sense of being involved in the daily life of the church. This means that they are not members of another congregation.

themselves had never been exposed to Christianity. The first-generation Christian can experience a mixed response from the family. Some families may reject the first-generation Christians once they have made a commitment to follow Christ. This rejection is often based on fear, because the family simply does not understand the Gospel and sees the change of attitude and behaviour in the new Christian.

Especially in Asia, the change to Christianity is often interpreted as rejection of the culture in which they grew up, as we have seen in an earlier chapter

Philip Butler comments on this when he mentions that most Western people live in a more individual lifestyle compared to people in the more traditional societies. The traditional society sees the extended family and community as part of the life of the individual.³⁰⁴ The reader will see in the study the effect relationships have on the spreading of the Gospel within and outside of the Asian Christian church. God's Word and love transcends cultures and brings people into unity.

5.2 Why interview first-generation Christians?

The goal in interviewing first-generation Christians was to satisfy certain questions on how they coped within the church after they came to salvation. It is important to find out what helped the first-generation Christians to mature most quickly and also to find out how they understand certain key concepts such as faith, God, church and fellowship.

In turn, I want to detect from the answers to these questions, what the best methods are that can be employed within the church to help Christians mature. The

³⁰⁴ Phillip Butler, "The Power of Partnership" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorn (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 755

reason for this is that many Christians within the Western church are not maturing as well and as quickly as those in the Asian church. I say this based on the discussion in an earlier chapter showing that outreach by Christians is far lower in a Western church than in the Asian churches. I need to find the reason for this. I also want to see if there was a different rate of growth when comparing men and women.

Presently the Western church has a huge task ahead of it; the evangelising of large numbers of people who have had little to do with Christianity. How will the Western church cope with an influx of new first-generation Christians? This chapter will help us understand first-generation Christians, what they felt was vital to help them find God and walk the path of God.

The desired outcome of the interviews of first-generation Christians would be to answer the following questions indirectly. I specifically say 'indirectly' because I hope that the questions I ask the first-generation Christians will allow me to answer the following questions. The reader should understand that these are not direct questions asked to the interviewees, but rather, the questions I ask myself and hope they will be answered as a result of our interviews. These indirect questions allow me to formulate more direct questions to ask in the interviews in order to find answers.

- i) - How does one cope with a first-generation Christian within a church setting, especially in the Western church? In other words, must the pastor have a different approach to congregants, depending on their spiritual history and status?

- ii) - Do first-generation Christians mature faster in smaller groups first – such as in the house church situation in China for instance? We need to ask whether the situation in China for instance, could ever work in a Western setting.
- iii) - Does a first-generation Christian mature faster than one who has grown up in a Christian home? In other words, what made the Christian grow? Does isolation from a believing family force a new Christian to mature faster?
- iv) - Do first-generation Christians start witnessing sooner than those who have grown up in a Christian setting?
- v) - Church attendance – do women have more freedom to attend fellowship in their newfound faith or are men more likely to reach out to others in their new faith?
- vi) - Equality – do the male and female Christians in the NLCC have equal opportunity to move freely and go on mission or outreach?
- vii) - Household – to detect whether the household of the first-generation Christian became Christians fastest if the father rather than the mother became a new Christian. In other words, is the father or mother the most likely to influence the family's beliefs?

This part of the study can shed light on how the Western church would need to cope with an influx of first-generation Christians. I say this in the light of the fact that many Australian households have never been to church.

5.3 *The lost generation in Australia*

It can be observed that there is a so-called *lost-generation* in post-Christian Australia.

By *lost generation* I mean those without a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible.³⁰⁵

There is a generation in Australia where few people have ever been to church. They know about the Bible because it has been referred to before in conversation. Many have inherited or been given Bibles from grandparents and have sadly never seen the need to use them. In 1901 Australian society consisted of only 1% professing to have a non-Christian religion as opposed to 16% between the years 1996-2001.³⁰⁶ These figures equate to about 3, 2 million non-Christian people who may suddenly come to Christ. How would the church cope?

Traditional churches, in the past, have had certain structures in place for those coming to church services. One of the structures that all traditional churches have is the Sunday school for youngsters. The situation we have in Australia is that many youngsters have never been exposed to Sunday school or any Bible teaching for that matter, simply because their parents have not been regular church attendants. No single religion may be discussed or promoted in schools and therefore no religious education occurs in Australia.

This situation leaves us with the predicament in that the Western church, particularly in Australia, is unable to cope with the current situation, let alone equipped to cope

³⁰⁵ Lost Generation is usually a term used for the Aboriginal children taken away from their families and brought up in western households in order to westernise them. This practice resulted in a generation of 'lost' children that the present Labour Government apologised for in 2008. The researcher believes this is not the only lost generation. There are whole families that have never gone to church for two generations – this is what I refer to as the lost generation.

³⁰⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "1301.0- Year Book Australia, 2006"
<http://www.abs.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/> (accessed 7 May 2009).

with large-scale conversions. In the past, Western church attendants always had some basic knowledge of the Bible, but a situation has arisen where many people have no knowledge of the Bible.

In Asian countries they have had large-scale conversions of first-generation Christians and have been successful in maturing them to the extent that they are outward reaching and mission minded. We can learn from the NLCC on how to cope with first-generation Christians within a Western setting. This is the reason for allocating study time to the first-generation Christians within the NLCC.

5.4 *The first-generation group*

The first-generation group I chose to study from the NLCC is made up of six male members and four female members. I chose to mix the genders to detect if there were differences in experiencing the Gospel. I interviewed twelve first-generation Christians in the NLCC although I have chosen to include ten only in this section. I thought that including a greater number of first-generation Christians would not make a difference to the result, and that saturation point has been reached in this instance. This process that Neuman refers to as saturation point is cited in de Vos.³⁰⁷ Secondly, the interviews to follow in subsequent chapters on the returned missionaries, youth leaders and worship group all comprise a majority of first-generation Christians simply because the majority of the congregants in NLCC are first-generation Christians.

³⁰⁷ Saturation point refers to the principle where the gathered data and information collected is complete because no new data is added from subsequent interviews in this case. For more information see A S de Vos (ed), H Strydom, C B Fouche, C S L Delpont, *Research at Grass Roots* 2nd Ed, (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2002), 336

5.5 *The interviews*

- I interviewed 12 (of whom 10 are mentioned in this thesis as stated earlier) first-generation Christians out of a total of 200 congregants in the NLCC. My reason for selecting these 12 in particular was the following: firstly all first-generation Christians in NLCC were invited to participate in this particular section. Secondly, I chose the first 12 respondents who were not already involved in any of the other groups that needed to be interviewed- such as the returned missionary group or members of youth groups. Thirdly, I wanted to involve as many NLCC members as possible in order to get a broader response to my questions. As mentioned earlier, because of the saturation point in the interviewing process, only ten of the twelve interviews were used in this thesis.

I chose to interview the first-generation Christians so that I could ask additional questions at the time if I felt that they did not understand the questions or if I wanted to get more information. All interviews were conducted after church services. I allowed the interviewees to e-mail me some of their answers if they needed to think about some questions in greater depth. Eight of the ten interviewees made use of this option additionally to their interviews. Many interviewees wanted more time to think about questions such as their understanding of God's sovereignty and prayer.

- All ten interviewees have been Christians for longer than five years at the time the interviews were conducted. I felt that I could get a more accurate

picture from the 'more senior' first-generation Christians simply because they have had the luxury of time to reflect on what aspects of the church, they felt, were the best support mechanisms for first-generation Christians.

- The interviewees needed to answer seven questions so that I could gain a clear picture on how first-generation Christians experienced church. The questions needed to cover their understanding of salvation and how they came to salvation, church, mission and outreach, past belief systems and their influence on how they experience Christianity. I also needed to understand what first-generation Christians felt was important for their growth and maturation as Christians. Were there certain church activities that proved more helpful toward their growth than others? I wondered if prayer played an important role in their Christian walk. Other questions asked covered aspects such as how first-generation Christians experienced God or understood the concept of God. I chose this particular group of initially twelve first-generation Christians because they had no clue about the Gospel before coming to salvation. They also come from diverse backgrounds and this may have had a bearing on how their salvation walk has been experienced and has also dictated their mission-mindedness.

- The six men range in age from 25 years old to 55 years old. The four ladies range in age from 40 years to 55 years.

Six of the ten interviewees were *free thinkers*³⁰⁸ before coming to salvation.

Two of the six free thinkers are female and four are males. The remaining four interviewees used to be Buddhist. Two of the previously Buddhist interviewees are male and the other two are female.

5.6 The questions

5.6.1 How did you come to salvation?

a. Outreach Meetings

Six of the ten first-generation Christians came to salvation in evangelist outreach meetings in Asia. A student friend had invited one of the male interviewees to an outreach meeting. Some colleagues had invited two male first-generation Christians to a men's fellowship at that time. Neither of the two had any idea about Christianity but went along because they did not want to be rude to their friends by rejecting the invitation. The fourth person in this group, a female interviewee had seen a change in her friend who had come to salvation and so went along out of curiosity to see what happens at the so-called Christian meetings. Another two ladies in this group had been invited by work colleagues to outreach meetings. They valued their positions in the workplace and felt that it would be rude to refuse an invitation. In other words, three female and three male interviewees came to salvation at outreach meetings. This proves that, in this particular study, the majority of the people came to salvation outside church walls.

³⁰⁸ Free thinkers – the participants explained that free thinkers meant that they had no particular belief, neither Buddhist nor Hindu, but rather, they had a mixture of beliefs and moved freely within these beliefs. Often life experience itself defined what they believed at that time.

b. Church

The remaining four first-generation Christians in this group had come to salvation through family. An extended family member had led the female in the group to salvation while the other male in the group had seen a change in his wife and so went to church with her just to keep peace in his home. His wife had recently come to salvation and was therefore a very new Christian at the time. Both of these Christians had attended a church meeting with their family member and not specifically an evangelical outreach meeting. The remaining two male members of the group were both students at the time. Each of them was invited to attend a church meeting with a fellow student. These students did not know one another at the time and their invitation to church was at different times. One student saw the change in a friend who had recently come to salvation. When the student friend invited him to church, he went to 'observe' what happens at church. The other student accepted the invitation to church after he heard that the church was 'youth friendly'. From this information we can deduce that one female and three male first-generation Christians came to salvation by attending church meetings.

As previously stated, the outreach meetings appeared to be more successful in bringing people to salvation. We need to notice at this point that all the people who came to salvation in the church building did so because they had been invited to church and not because they were attracted to a particular church. This factor proves the essential point of this thesis/ study, in that we see that all people need to step into the role of evangelist, not merely those who are trained in evangelism.

We can see that there is no difference, in this case, in the genders as to where people have come to salvation. I say this because three out of the six males came to salvation at evangelical outreach meetings and the other three came to salvation when they were invited to church. We only have four ladies in the group, as seen above; three came to salvation in evangelical outreach meetings and one when she was invited to church. We can also say that Christian outreach meetings or church meetings can successfully bring people to salvation.

5.6.2 What do you understand by mission and outreach?

All ten first-generation Christians consider mission and outreach and the completion of the Great Commission to be a vital part of their Christian calling. However, there was no particular pattern detected when considering whether the evangelical meeting converts or church converts started outreach to other non-Christians sooner.

However, those who started to witness about their salvation the soonest after making a life commitment were those who had the most radical conversions.

For example, the gentleman who attended church with his wife several times had a sudden episode of '*deliverance*' before one particular service soon after following his wife to church.³⁰⁹ Within one month he was witnessing. He spoke of the experience of having had 'other spirits driven out' of his body in a pre-service meeting. He had gone along to this service because he did not think there was any harm in going to the prayer meeting before the service. This particular interviewee had come from a

³⁰⁹ "Deliverance" is a broad term used to counsel, pray for and drive out evil spirits from a person. Most deliverance is a session of prayer for release from oppression by evil spirits. The more radical deliverance sessions are those where the person was possessed by evil spirits.

Buddhist family. Obviously the radical change in his life proved to be a great witnessing tool to his extended family and acquaintances.

It appears that the ex-Buddhists were the quickest to witness after receiving salvation. I say this in spite of the fact that the male ex-Buddhist's family have not yet come to salvation although he started to witness within a month of salvation. His acquaintances were more receptive to the Gospel. The female ex-Buddhist's family have all come to salvation. She was afraid to witness to her family at first, so started to witness to the extended family and friends first. She admits that she was afraid of being rejected by her direct family who were staunch Buddhists. The remaining two Buddhists, one male and one female were also hesitant to witness to their direct family. They found it easier to witness to friends. They both felt that once they had learned to share their testimony, they were more comfortable in sharing their newfound faith with family. They both admitted being extremely cautious, as they were afraid of being rejected by their families. As we can deduce from the above information, there is no difference in the four Buddhists sharing their salvation. The two men and two women in this group all started to witness soon after salvation but were more at ease among people other than their family.

The six freethinkers all have family that have come to salvation. However, they did not all start witnessing about their Christianity in a particular pattern. The two female freethinkers witnessed about their new faith immediately but the one male ex-free thinker took more than a year before he felt comfortable in witnessing. The other three male free thinkers in the group shared their faith soon after salvation with their families and friends.

The fact that all female first-generation Christians started to witness about their new faith immediately can be pointed out. However, two are ex-Buddhist and the other two are ex-Free thinker. This means that no definite pattern can be detected between the past belief systems. There is also no difference between the sexes as far as outreach goes. I say this because four out of four of the females started to witness immediately as opposed to five out of six male first-generation Christians.

However, the four female participants mentioned that fervent prayer for their families made the most difference in how quickly their families came to salvation. The remaining six male first-generation Christians also agreed that prayer made a difference to how they witnessed to their families and friends. Prayer also made the families more receptive to the Gospel. They likened this to the fact that Jesus did nothing without His Father's knowledge or without praying first. In other words, they found that prayer is the best preparation before witnessing to non-Christians.

5.6.3 What role would past- belief systems play?

A definite pattern can be detected when analysing previous beliefs and family support. Six of the ten first-generation Christians had been freethinkers before coming to salvation. They had grown up in families with no particular belief. When they came to salvation, their families supported them fully in their new salvation walk. The ex- free thinkers had the easiest time after salvation in that their families supported them, and their families came to salvation too.

The time lapse between their salvation and that of their family varies. The reason for this is that many of these first-generation Christians came to Australia and so left their families behind in Asia. They could only share the Gospel in times of visiting the family in Asia. Those who had family living nearby at the time of conversion made new converts quickly within their families.

The four first-generation Christians who had a Buddhist background had no support from their family at first. One commented that the salvation message 'got lost in the translation'. They experienced difficulty within their families in that they were not understood. The Gospel message was not understood and they had very little support for their new belief. Only two of the four ex-Buddhists direct families have come to salvation. Three of these families still live in Asia.

We can therefore conclude that where there is no particular belief system in a family, the people are open to new beliefs. Where there is a strong faith, such as in Buddhist families, where faith and culture are connected; it is far more difficult to bring the Gospel to the family.

5.6.4 What support mechanisms were most effective in your Christian growth?

All ten first-generation Christians felt that they were well supported after conversion either by the church or within the evangelical outreach. They all mentioned the following as the support mechanisms that made a difference in their salvation walk.

- a. Cell leaders

All ten mentioned that their cell leaders were vital role-players in their new walk with Christ. The group gave detailed accounts of support they enjoyed from their cell leaders. The support came in the form of prayer support, explanations about Bible passages, Biblical answers to life's questions they raised at the time and also encouragement they received on their daily journey with their newfound faith.

b. Pastoral support

Nine of the ten mentioned their pastors as vital support. The one who did not think the pastor was of utmost importance did so because he had little contact in a previous large congregation with his pastor. He found the fellowship group was his greatest support. The other nine interviewees said that the pastor had always been available and returned calls when they needed to speak to him. They found the sermons to be informative and not too difficult to understand. They valued the fact that every sermon was Bible-based, which meant that they could write down basic points and go and study the Word for themselves later.

c. Bible reading and study

All ten mentioned that they read as much of the Bible as they could and other Christian literature if it was available. However, they all mentioned that without a personal passion for Christ, they could not grow. No amount of programmes and church input can replace spending personal time with their Saviour. All ten first-generation Christians commented that Bible knowledge is crucial – because without it they would not be able to explore the Bible further and deeper outside of the fellowship gathering.

d. Weekly support systems

All ten mentioned that simply meeting once a week for a sermon was never enough to mature into a witnessing/mission-minded Christian. They all realised that support systems are vital in their salvation walk. The support systems they raised were cell-groups, prayer meetings, Bible studies, Youth groups in the case of younger Christians, the family atmosphere of the church and the invitation to other Christian's homes in order to share time and a meal together.

e. Community of faith

The Asian stresses 'community' as an important part of life and culture. We can detect from this part of the study that they felt meeting with others as vital support. However the responsibility, the interviewees felt, for growth in faith is not the pastor's or church's responsibility, but rather the individual's.

f. Cultivating the passion

They all spoke about *cultivating the passion* for Jesus by walking closely with Him. By cultivating the passion, they meant that they needed to keep a close relationship with Jesus through prayer and Bible study. The more they learnt about Jesus, the more they wanted to learn. They also wanted to reach out to others and share their faith because they had the desire to see everybody worship the One True God.

The following are some of the comments made by the group about cultivating the passion for Jesus. I found it best to quote them directly to indicate to the reader the passion these first-generation Christians have for God.

- i) – “*The* only way to know His will for my life is to know Him first and have a personal relationship with Him. This is a daily walk and not a weekly encounter.”
- ii) - “It is not the pastor’s responsibility for my growth in faith, but entirely between my Master and me.”
- iii) - “The church can support in every way possible, but I must have the passion for Christ in order to reach out to others.”
- iv) - “My journey will decide my ultimate destination. Only I can be responsible and answerable to God.”
- v) - “The church does not bring us to salvation – it is the blood of the Lamb. We need to meet with the Lamb and then we will grow.”
- vi) - “God is my father, I cannot hide from Him. I need to repent daily in order to walk with Him in holiness. Repentance is my responsibility”
- vii) - “I crave to know more about my King. I can only do this by spending time with Him.”
- viii) - “Can we ever fathom God? He is my light to show my path and my light to show my ultimate path. I walk the path with Him. My pastor cannot do it for me.”
- ix) - “God is my passion in life, nothing else should take precedence. When we serve God, we serve the church because we do His will.”

- x) - “Jesus said that in order to know the Father, we must know Him first. I think that I am only beginning to understand the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. There is so much more to understand in the church being the Bride of Christ.”

From the above comments we can see a pattern of all ten first-generation Christians taking responsibility for their growth in faith. They did not expect a church to do it for them, nor did they expect the pastor to take responsibility. They prayed for a hunger and thirst to know the Master better and spend time with Him. One needs to ask the question – could it be that the first-generation Christians had no history of church attendance as a family, which means that when they became Christians they did not expect the church to be responsible for their growth. In other words, they knew their walk/ Christian growth was their own responsibility.

5.6.5 What is understood by fellowship and brotherhood?

They all stressed the importance of sharing their faith in fellowship with brothers/sisters in Christ and by following the example of Godly brothers and sisters in Christ.

The following comment quoted below, sums up the importance of the Word and fellowship to the first-generation Christian, as mentioned by the group.

Salvation is through the blood of Christ. Growth is through walking in God’s will and way humbly. Outreach is through feeling loved enough to show others the way in turn. Without the warmth of brotherly love, the heart cannot comprehend the love of God. Word without Spirit and love cannot warm the heart of a dying man.

The ten interviewees agreed that fellowship plays a vital role in the growth of individual Christians. They believe that it supported them in the days they were unsure. Fellowship strengthened them in times of weakness and doubt and this taught them to walk as Jesus would have. Fellowship gave them a hunger to know God because they could see Him in others. Fellowship also strengthens the new Christians who could not share their newfound faith with their families at first, especially the ex-Buddhists as we have shown above in the interviews.

5.6.6 What is understood by the concept 'church'?

In understanding the concept of 'church' the first-generation Christians had interesting perceptions of church.

- i)- Believers

Nine of the ten mentioned that the church is anyone who believes in Christ and has made a commitment to follow Him. By this they meant that a believer is the church. A fellowship is understood to be the corporate meeting of believers to form the Body of Christ. They understood it to be the gathering of believers to worship God in a corporate sense. Denominationalism was never mentioned.

- ii)- Bride of Christ

The concept of the Bride of Christ is discussed more fully later in this chapter.

The ten interviewees all laid stress on the gathering of Christians in God's name as the coming together in community as the Bride of Christ. They understood the Bride of Christ to mean a group of believers who worship God and spread His word on earth until the time comes when He sends His Son Jesus to fetch those who have

been obedient. Jesus is the Bridegroom and the church is the Bride. They all mentioned corporate worship could take place at any time believers gathered, and not merely a certain day of the week, such as a Sunday. One comment was “God is the Lord of every day, so we fellowship whenever the Spirit calls us together.”

iii)- Church is not a building

Six of the ten interviewees came to salvation in evangelistic meetings. These meetings were not in specific church buildings. It is seen from the interviews that they never perceived the place of salvation to be a specific type of building/church. They saw the church as the group of believers at any one given place and time. The other four interviewees came to the Lord by following family to a Christian church. Not one of this group felt that the traditional church building is the place where salvation takes place. They all said that salvation takes place wherever God chose to make His presence felt. This may possibly be the reason the Asian Christian has the concept of seeing a church as wall-less. They have often experienced God outside any traditionally Christian building and so they do not attach great importance to a building, but rather, to the Builder of the Body of Christ.

5.6.7 How important is prayer?

First-generation Christians when asked about prayer and their understanding and function of prayer made the following comments.

- i) - “Every believer needs to pray everyday – all day. There is no activity we do in life that is without the knowledge of Almighty God.”

- ii) - “The more I pray, the more I want to pray. It is my special time with God. I know He is always listening. I do not need to set myself apart in order to hear God; He is part of my daily existence.”
- iii) - “It is so easy to talk to God, my life concerns Him; and so it should be because I am His child. He has promised that we will go from ‘one degree of glory to the next’ – how can I do this without talking to my Father?”
- iv) - “Prayer is fellowship with God. God is available at all times. Fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ encourages corporate prayer.”
- v) - “Fervent prayer drives away evil and brings down the Glory Cloud of God. I want to dwell under His wings in this Glory Cloud.”
- vi) - “Prayer is vital for life. God guides us through answered prayer.”
- vii) - “Prayer is the life-blood of a life lived to God’s glory.”
- viii) - “Prayer takes many shapes. Prayer can be in thanksgiving or supplication, but it is always to God’s glory.”
- ix) - “A Christian life cannot be lived without prayer. Without prayer we will dry up because we are no longer connected to the source of our life.”
- x) - “Prayer heals us physically and spiritually, prayer changes lives, moves mountains and prayer ushers in the second coming of our King.”

The group agree on the following comment made. “The busier we are, the more we need to talk to God. He paves the way for the day. I can look back in peace on every day that I have walked with my Saviour.”

During the interview, it became apparent that there are differences between the Western Christian church and the Asian Christian church. The following comments were made by the group as to what they thought are the main differences.

5.7 Main differences between the Asian and Western church – as perceived by the first-generation group interviewed

5.7.1 Corporate worship and humility

The interviewees said that the sovereignty of God is not always appreciated in the Western church. All ten interviewees had attended Western churches at some stage when first coming to Australia. Comments were made about Western Christians putting on 'shows' to entertain and draw crowds rather than to please God. All ten interviewees felt that holy awe and reverence is often absent from the more charismatic branches of the church. All ten interviewees stated that going to worship corporately was an opportunity to humble themselves before God and others. They all understood that when they humble themselves before God, they are open to Him moulding them as He wishes. They related it to the Potter who needs to mould and bend individuals to give Him the glory.

As they spend time with God, they believe that He is growing and maturing them for a greater calling. Uppermost in everyone's mind is the need to mature in such a way that they may evangelise and bring in the lost and captive. All ten interviewees believe that spiritual growth takes place when humility is practiced. During corporate worship services believers would often humble themselves by kneeling spontaneously at their seats or by going to the front of the sanctuary in the final

stages of the services and prostrating themselves there. The rest of the congregation appeared to accept this display of humility as normal. When asked about this display of humility, they commented that they go before God in repentance. This repentance is also a showing of humility to the whole group.

First-generation Christians saw corporate worship as an opportunity to bring glory to God within the body of Christ context. However, they all believe that every opportunity to bring glory to God should be taken during daily life. They felt that the Western Christian failed in this instance because in any workplace it is difficult to pick out the Christian. They perceive the Western Christian to be 'under cover agents' who are only openly Christian when surrounded by other Christians and that the Western Christian appears not to be strong enough to stand up for their faith. They felt that the possible reason for this Western approach could be because of the lack of experience in sharing their testimonies or even lack of general knowledge of the Bible and its command to spread the Gospel.

5.7.2 Sovereignty of God

The following are some comments the first-generation Christians made on how they understood God and His sovereignty:

- i) - "Almighty God is the Great I Am. I revere Him and I fear Him only."
- ii) - "God is Father, Creator, Restorer and Author and Finisher of that which He has started in me."
- iii) - "God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent; how dare I be disobedient to the One who knows all about me."

- iv) - “God is Father of all, He breathes life into us through His Son, and He continues to feed us. Humility before Father brings His glory cloud down – then we feel His presence and we know His will for our lives.”
- v) - “God fills all of creation. He is life unto life. I look forward to that time when I can see Him face to face. In this life I walk with Him and tabernacle with Him through His Holy Spirit. It humbles me that I cannot even approach Him of myself, I needed Jesus to wash me clean by His blood and I need the Holy Spirit within me to give me that longing for fellowship with God. I can do nothing of my own accord. What a humbling thought. God can do without me, but it pleases Him when I make myself available to do His will.”
- vi) - “God is the King of my life, it’s that simple.”
- vii) - “God is the only God, therefore He is sovereign.”
- viii) - “God loves us, He is King now in this life when we hand ourselves over to Him. He is also King in the next life. This is a sobering thought.”
- ix) - “God is the answer to all of life’s questions, because He knew the questions mere man would ask.”
- x) - “God is God, He is the I AM, I bow in fear before Him, yet I long for eternity with Him.”

I believe that the above comments of the NLCC members demonstrate that they revere God totally in every area of their lives. The fear and reverence for God demonstrates to the researcher that the Asian Christians include God in every area of their lives because He is all encompassing.

5.7.3 Spiritual warfare

The Asian Christian sees Christianity as a constant spiritual battle, especially in areas where the lives of believers are threatened. In a Western country, such as Australia, where freedom of religion is allowed, Christians often forget the price that is paid for being a Christian in other areas. They say that it appears the Western Christians are often locked in their daily materialistic life and are less perceptive to the spiritual things around them. The interviewees all felt that the Asians are more aware of the spiritual because of their upbringing and this makes them more perceptive in the spirit. This could explain why their families rejected the ex-Buddhist interviewees. They had perceived the switch from one belief to another to be a huge step. From a spiritual warfare point of view, they believe that enemy spirits would have been very active in rejecting those who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

All ten interviewees had learnt about spiritual warfare early in their walk with Jesus. They all stated that they do spiritual warfare continually. By *spiritual warfare* they meant fervent prayer against evil powers that were threatening their families or the church group they attended. They also called one another into corporate spiritual warfare when a breakthrough was needed over a particular area of the town or even over a particular group that may have been threatening the Christians.

They all mentioned that they often fast and pray during spiritual warfare. They found the most effective prayer and fasting to be as a corporate body. Sometimes a particular day is set aside when they fast and pray. They said that they divide the day into hours and during each hour somebody of the church needs to be present to pray for the breakthrough in the spirit.

All ten interviewees stated that they were not surprised by spiritual activity around them. In fact, they welcomed it as part of their Christian walk. One comment was, “when we are about to break through, we often get opposition in the spirit realm. We see this as evidence that we are stomping on Satan’s territory.”

The interviewees all considered spiritual warfare as the only way to live as an overcomer. An *overcomer* is a Christian who lives in victory because he is informed in His Word. The overcomer does not take setbacks as part of life, but sees setbacks for what they are, as Satan holding him back in their walk with Christ. They believe that the church should move forward and take the land by promoting the Great Commission.

5.7.4 Word preaching

The Asian church relies heavily on the Bible to bring the Good News to the listeners. Often the Bible is the only resource book. No other input can be used because of lack of resources in certain areas where some of the interviewees came from. This has proved to be a blessing, because the Asian takes the Bible seriously and expects signs and wonders to follow the preaching of the Word, just as Jesus promised.³¹⁰ They get to know the God of the Book and call upon Him. In the interviews the first-generation Christians stressed how important it was for them to be taught from the Word. They all agree that they continually went back to the Word in their private time to learn more about God. They all considered Word or Biblical preaching as vital for encouraging the new Christian to get to know God better through His Word.

³¹⁰ Mark chapter 16 verses 16 and 17 promises that signs and wonders follow the preaching of the Word.

In the West, they have been exposed to many Christian authors and found that these often stop them from delving deeply into God's Word. The first-generation Christians felt that we should view Christian literature as just that – literature written by man. They feel that they could only really get to have a deeper relationship with God when they worshipped together with other believers and studied God's Word. They feel that they should guard against studying somebody else's thoughts about God's Word but should experience the Holy Spirit inspired Word personally.

Further evidence of the seriousness of the study of the Bible can be seen in that most NLCC members write notes during sermons. Every person brings a Bible to church. During the coffee break after the service, people can be heard discussing the sermon they have just heard. They are all hungry for the Word. The interviewees commented that when they have attended other Western churches, most people did not discuss the sermon afterwards. They also found it strange that most people did not bring a Bible to church.

Christian education classes are held before the service for those who have no knowledge of the Bible. Different people present these classes, and not just the pastor. This aspect will be discussed later. However, the interviewees did mention that they attended these classes in Asia so that they could get to know God's Word better. They found it invaluable so that they could have a deeper understanding of the Word.

5.7.5 Fellowship and brotherhood – their importance to first-generation Christians.

All ten first-generation Christians who were interviewed mentioned that cell groups and getting together for fellowship was most important in helping them to walk in their new faith. Without fellowship outside of the worship service, they believe they would not have matured so quickly or to the extent that they have. They found that the sharing of God's Word and showing brotherly love happened so easily in fellowship, that it was not difficult to adopt the ways of the Lord. They could see the love of the Lord in those whom they met during fellowship. First-generation Christians all believed that this sharing of love and the gospel was normal for all Christians. The first-generation Christians had experienced first hand, or known somebody who had been rejected or persecuted for their faith. They felt that they had seen both the good news of the Gospel proclaimed and seen the blessings flow from God, but they had also seen rejection and persecution and seen how cell group leaders and fellowship leaders behave in a Christian way when these dire circumstances arise.

The fellowship/brotherhood understood in the Asian context is vastly different to that understood by the general Western Christian. Members must be prepared to die for one another. This fact was demonstrated in a Sunday worship service at the New Life City Church. The pastor challenged the people present that day by asking if anyone there would honestly be prepared to die in the place of anyone else present in the meeting. I witnessed people raising their hands in complete submission to God. They were prepared to die to protect their Christian brothers and sisters. One

realises that the first-generation Christian is humble and prepared to lay down his life for Jesus in much the same way as the New Testament church at the beginning of the church age. How different it felt being in a church where the Blood of the Lamb is seen for what it is and where martyrdom is considered an honour.

After arriving in Australia the first-generation Christian gravitated toward the Asian Christian grouping because they felt most at home. Several first-generation Christians had been to so-called non-Asian churches in Perth, but missed having fellowship. They believe that going to a mostly Asian Christian church is partly because they can express themselves better among their own, but also because they understand the Asian pastor well and he can identify with their experiences more easily. They also felt more cared for in the NLCC because they desired a greater closeness with their fellow Christians.

It is interesting to notice that when the NLCC started as the original Genesis Fellowship, all of the first-generation Christians had been attending other churches but met as a group for fellowship in the Word. This separate fellowship was because of their individual desire for the Word and the lack of opportunities in the churches they attended. This was essentially the beginning of the NLCC. All ten first-generation Christians mentioned fellowship and Word-teaching as essential in the growth of individual Christians and in the growth of the Bride of Christ in general. All ten interviewees mentioned that the need exists for balance in the Word. The Western church, they felt, tends to concentrate on the blessings and positive aspects of the Gospel, while there is a real lack in preparation for days of suffering. By this

suffering they meant the full range of experiences from having a difficult life of addictions or lack of finances to persecution for their faith.

5.7.6 First-generation Christians' understanding of the "Bride of Christ"

Added to the above statement, the *rapture* is not understood as a way to avoid future trouble.³¹¹ The Asian Christian lays great stress on the spotless Bride of Christ who becomes the glorified Bride of Christ at the time of the rapture. However, being spotless is the key word. During the general discussion, they understood spotless to mean, 'to be tried and tested and not found wanting.'³¹² They all agreed that an excellent working knowledge of God's Word is the key to keeping on the road to sanctification after salvation.

In other words, salvation and making a commitment to serve God is the first step. Thereafter, growth in faith takes place. This growth can only take place when sins are identified within the believer's life and dealt with according to God's Word. Knowledge of God's Word is the essential ingredient in further growth and walking in holiness in order to be spotless. They understood that no amount of good works could secure a place in the rapture, but rather, a love for Jesus so deep that all knowledge of Him is shared and where believers stand in holy reverence for the great God we serve. They further stressed that Christ is the Bridegroom and the church corporate is the Bride of Christ. All Christians make up the church corporate. Christ has said that He will come to fetch his spotless bride.

³¹¹ Rapture is the concept whereby the church will be taken away by Jesus before, during or after the Great Tribulation. 1 Thess 4:16-18.

³¹² Based on the famous words in Daniel 5:27 "...you have been weighed in the scales and found wanting..."

The interviewees felt that humility, repentance, awe of God and making oneself available as a living sacrifice to be used by God are hallmarks of a Christian's walk in sanctification. They added that they understood sanctification to mean the cleansing of the Christian's life. They said that this is to happen on a daily basis by repentance and listening to God for His direction. Sanctification is a daily process for the rest of their lives on earth.

The simple, obedient and humble faith of the first-generation Christian is easily observed. They understand the Bible for what it is – and expect the miracles that took place in the Bible, will still take place today. Great stress is laid on prayer – corporate and personal.

5.8 Comparing two situations

The group interviewed raised the following scenario to demonstrate their passion for all Christians to be nurtured and disciplined.

Who is likely to mature the quickest?

The family who goes to church on a Sunday and they are lukewarm in the Spirit all week. The family has no other exposure to Christian outreach during the week. The next Sunday they go to church to try and pick up where they left off. However, much has been lost in the week and they have cooled off in their spiritual growth. This is in contrast with a new Christian whose family does not know the Lord. They meet for celebration/worship services weekly with the corporate body of Christ. During the week they are fuelled in the Spirit by the love of the brotherhood, by being exposed to all the gifts of the Spirit and they are encouraged to walk in God's way. They are

also encouraged to share their salvation story. The input is far higher in the smaller groups. The impact on Christian growth is far greater. The growth is even quicker when the family are not Christian and the new Christian needs to mature quickly in order to evangelise their family.

5.9 The Western church and first-generation Christians

In the light of the above interviews and responses it appears that the Western Christian church in general is failing in its task to meet the need of first-generation Christians. This particular group of first-generation Christians did not feel that they were fed enough on the Word and supported or given opportunity to grow in the Western Christian Church. The following points appear to be the general shortcoming the first-generation Christians felt when attending a Western church, in Australia in particular.

a. Lack of basic Biblical knowledge

The Australian Christian church is apparently not in a position to accommodate first-generation Christians because they have always assumed that most people entering the church building have some knowledge of the Gospel. However, the situation has arisen where many people have little knowledge of the Gospel, by this I do not mean immigrants from elsewhere entering Australia either. The Western church is in the position now where it needs to learn to cater for adults with no prior Gospel knowledge. The situation is such that the church can no longer expect the church attendants to get to know the Gospel and to grow in faith by attending church once a week.

b. Discipleship

In order to mature, all Christians need to have input into their lives in the form of discipleship. This discipleship can be seen as taking the Word and bringing it into the practical realm by showing the new Christian how the teaching of the Gospel impacts on their lives. This can only be done in smaller groups, be they cell groups, Bible studies, Christian education groups or youth groups. The small group will not only take the role of the family in the life of the new believer, but it must be seen as the primary support for the new Christian. In this group the new believers learn about the Gospel and how to testify about their new faith. This will also strengthen them for the times they are on their own –such as in their non-Christian or pre- Christian family or workplace where there may not necessarily be other believers. The new believer needs to be nurtured as a newborn baby – this can never be done in a large gathering such as a church service.

Jesus used the small group of disciples to teach the Father's Word. Jesus knew that discipleship is of utmost importance to show 'The Way'. The Western church continually comments that it is going back to the New Testament church – but many have left out the most important aspect of discipleship.

c. Walk in holiness

In the discipleship group the new Christian is nurtured past the salvation moment to walk in holiness. Holiness can only result from thorough teaching of the Word, baptism and a complete turning away from the old life. When salvation has taken place, then discipleship can continue where the passion for the Word is encouraged,

reverence for God is held in high esteem but where the humility of the Christian can be seen in the example of Jesus. Jesus humbled Himself to become a man to bring His Father's love to us. Humility appears to be a vital aspect in the small group. When people are humble before God, then they are teachable and hear His voice. Jesus is the Shepherd. How do we hear our shepherd call when we are so busy making a noise in entertaining the congregants in church?

5.10 *Outcome of interviews*

During the interviews with the first-generation Christians, I reached the following conclusions.

a. Small group maturity

First-generation Christians mature faster when they meet in smaller groups and still go to corporate worship meetings. By these smaller groups I refer to Bible study groups, prayer groups, cell groups or Christian education groups. In the case of younger members, smaller groups also include the youth meetings.

From the above, we can say that a weekly corporate meeting of the body of Christ will not mature individuals as quickly as most churches would like to see growth, both in the individual and in the church. All churches have the aim to grow, but this cannot happen when new Christians are not allowed/given the opportunity in corporate worship. The initial euphoria of becoming a new creation in Christ is dampened when they sit in a large group and know they should not be heard because they are only in the 'learning phase.' We can all learn from the initial euphoria and the move of the Holy Spirit in the individual's life. We can only see this

move of the Spirit when the individual is within a smaller group where they are invited to express themselves, for example in sharing testimony, where they see brotherly love and acceptance and where they are valued for whom they are in Christ.

b. Ongoing testimony

The idea of giving an ongoing testimony in our walk with Christ, also prepares us to share our faith with others outside of the body of Christ. In this study I have seen that all the first-generation Christians found that when they shared their testimonies among Christians, they felt more confident to share it with non-Christians outside of the church. This means that the church became wall-less as God's word is spread outside the church and His name is glorified.

c. Cell groups

First-generation Christians, who have been heavily involved in cell groups outside of the weekly celebration service, mature faster because they thrive on the vibrancy of the group. A small group totally committed to God fuels the anointing in the new Christians. They experience this small group as their discipleship group. They are shown the way to live their faith practically by the group, the same way Jesus did with His disciples. I have set cell groups aside here because the first-generation Christians felt that the discipleship they needed was more pronounced in the cell group than for instance, a Bible study group. However, they did concede that it depended on the leader of the group as far as nurturing the new Christian was concerned.

d. Past belief systems

Past belief systems can influence the way the new believers mature in their Christian walk. No particular previous belief system allows the new Christian to be accepted easily by the family that may also not have a particular belief system, such as the Freethinkers. Buddhists who convert to Christianity sometimes appear to understand the spiritual side more easily, because the past belief system was filled with multiple gods. However, the Buddhist family of the new believer could make the first steps in the Christian journey more difficult because they perceive rejection of Buddhism to be rejection of their culture.

e. Opportunity for mission and outreach

There is no particular difference as to whether the male or female Christian had any different opportunity to move freely or go on mission. All are called by the Lord to go out and spread the Gospel, and everyone in the NLCC takes the opportunity. All the first-generation Christians believed that mission matured them more quickly in their spiritual growth, at whatever stage their mission opportunity took place.

f. Fervent prayer

Fervent prayer at all times proved to be the most important aspect for maturation of the individual Christians. All the interviewees mentioned the importance of prayer in their fellowship with one another and especially in their growth and relationship with God Himself.

g. Household coming to faith

There was also no marked difference in the households coming to faith of the male or female first-generation Christians. The researcher believes that the outcome could have been different if a large group had been interviewed.

h. Taking responsibility for growth

It is important to note that the first-generation Christians who had no history of going to church, never at anytime felt that the church is responsible for their spiritual growth. When new Christians have no family support, they rely more heavily on the fellowship of fellow believers. It appears that the Asian Christian does not associate God's presence with a church building, but rather, the presence of other Christians. I believe that this may be one of the reasons that the NLCC appears to be a wall-less church. All first-generation Christians in the NLCC saw the gathering together for church as corporate worship, but suggested that worship should be going on continually in their lives at all times. First-generation Christians stressed the importance of getting to know God's Word and getting to know the God of that Word. They all agreed that studying the Word is the responsibility of the individual.

i. Spiritual warfare

All the interviewees believed that knowledge of spiritual warfare was important to cope with everyday trials. This type of knowledge came with getting to know God's Word well and walking in a life of repentance and humility.

j. Reverence for God

The reverence the interviewees showed for Sovereign God played a major role in their walk in Faith. In showing reverence towards God they had respect for other Christians and felt love and care toward others in the Christian group. However, they also felt a need to spread the word of God outside the group because of their love for God. The passion to see the whole world saved is evident in the love for God displayed among their fellowmen.

5.11 Summary

During interviews with the first-generation Christians I detected certain patterns in their Christian development and outlook. This has a bearing on how the Gospel is understood and interpreted. This understanding of the Gospel has an effect on how the Christian matured. The study of how the church copes with first-generation Christians has been a rewarding study because we realise that many first-generation Christians have been on mission and are therefore part of the wall-less church. NLCC as an essentially Asian church within the Western setting has certain structures in place to support the first-generation Christian.

After taking the outcome of the interviews into consideration, I can conclude that there are a few basic needs that a new first-generation Christian calls for in order to grow. All first-generation Christians realised they are responsible for their own walk in faith and took it upon themselves to study God's Word. Discipleship in small groups, humility, repentance and reverence for God, gives young Christians security in their newfound faith. The security will nurture them into mature Christians who reach out and so spread the Word because they feel equipped to reach out and

share the Word and their testimony – in local outreach or mission further afield. Without discipleship the individual Christian cannot easily mature and the church cannot grow and penetrate society. Without discipleship, it seems the completion of the Great Commission could be an unachievable dream.

The findings of this chapter emphasise the importance of nurturing new Christians through discipleship as discussed by Coleman’s article *The Master’s Plan*.³¹³ Hawthorne confirms this in his article *Mandate on the Mountain*.³¹⁴ Piper’s article, *Discipling all the peoples* also confirms the importance of discipleship and its relation to the Great Commission.³¹⁵ Snyder’s chapter on *Church as Community* emphasises the importance of close-knit groups in the church.³¹⁶ He believes that “leadership grows out of discipleship.”³¹⁷ The first-generation interviewees, who perceived lack of Word teaching in the Western churches they attended, have confirmed Snyder’s concern that the Word of God is in crisis because people need to know who God is.³¹⁸

Gordon suggested testimony as a vital part of discipleship, thereby confirming the findings of this chapter.³¹⁹ From an Asian church perspective we see that discipleship

³¹³ Robert E Coleman, “The Master’s Plan.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 100

³¹⁴ Steven C Hawthorne, “Mandate on the Mountain.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 108

³¹⁵ John Piper, “Discipling all the Peoples.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 113

³¹⁶ Howard A Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 112

³¹⁷ Howard A Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 247

³¹⁸ Howard A Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 17

³¹⁹ Bob Gordon, *The Disciple’s Handbook for the Spirit-filled Life*. (UL: Kent, Sovereign World, 1993), 330-340

is vital in the Chinese house churches as discussed by Hattaway.³²⁰ Cho's chapter on *God's Reeducation Program* shows the importance of discipleship as part of cell group dynamics for first-generation Christians.³²¹ Another outcome of this chapter found that Christians must take responsibility for their growth in the faith; it is not the pastor's function. Cho raises this point when he discussed the importance of the pastor being the so-called controlling factor in home cell groups. Cho regards all these groups as ideal tools of evangelism.³²²

From the outcome of this chapter we can conclude that the first-generation Christian can grow and mature successfully within the church community provided they have close relationships in support groups during the week where they are taught the Word and its implementation in their lives.

³²⁰ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem* (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 129

³²¹ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Florida: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), 13

³²² David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Florida: Gainesville, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), 103-114

CHAPTER 6

THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH WITHIN THE NEW LIFE CITY CHURCH

The best way for the researcher to study the youth within the NLCC was so see how they perceive themselves and their role within the church. Interviews were held with various representatives from the different youth groups and other information gleaned from articles written in the *NLCC Epistles*. Another source of information on the youth was the researcher's attendance at church services and other church activities as a participant observer.

6.1 *NLCC demographic survey*

A church survey in the NLCC was held in November 2006. The church demographic suggested that the largest age group of the NLCC covered the 18 to 35 year age group. An average member of the NLCC is suggested to be a single (but nearly married) female that is a working adult in her late 20s or early 30s.

The result of the survey was published in the *NLCC Epistles*, a quarterly news edition published by the NLCC. During the survey it was discovered that the new service times of the church did not suit the majority of church attendants. The church had always had a combined service for all ages at 10.30am Sundays. During the course of 2006 the church times changed to 11am for anyone who considered him or herself to be youthful. This left the service open to whomever enjoyed the more vibrant music and youth-oriented messages and activities. Anyone was welcome to attend.

The regular church service changed to 9.30am for everyone else. During this service the Sunday school was held because most parents fitted into this category.

Both services were well attended, but the survey showed a different sentiment. The result of the survey suggested that the youth service of 11am ended too late for most students to attend lunch at the residences the university students lived in. Students complained that their day was too divided to do any meaningful study. Hence, after a few months, services were combined again. The older members of the church PREFERRED the youth to lead in the worship ministry. This proved to be an eye-opener and is indicative of the Asian culture. The elders of the community love having the youth around them. This also indicates the culture observed within the church. They are a real community of believers, irrespective of age. There is a mutual respect between age groups and a desire and need to keep families and community together.

The outcome of the survey was as follows from the *NLCC Epistles*.³²³

The combined church service, before the service times were split into youth and regular services started at 10.30am every Sunday. Now the new improved time after the survey moved the church service to 10am. This has proved a popular time for all age groups.

In order to give the youth the outreach service they desired, the youth of university age have a fortnightly service on a Saturday evening. These have proved immensely

³²³ Tricia Kao and Stephanie Tan, "Survey Results to Bring in the New Year." *New Life City Church Epistles*. Issue 3 (2007): 1.

popular in their outreach to the university non-believers. We will consider this aspect in greater detail later.

Another interesting aspect of the church survey proved that 67% of the church is keen to attend Christian Education Classes. This figure is double the attendance rate of the previous year. The Christian Education Classes were fitted into the 9 – 10 am time slot before church services.

The NLCC has divided the youth into several groups in order to plan age-related activities and Christian Education programs. We will have a closer look at the different youth categories. The information on the different groups was collected in the following way.

i) - Sunday school information was collected via general discussion with the parents whose children attend Sunday school as well through information published in the *NLCC Epistles*. I have also been in the position to be a participant observer on the activities and outcome of these classes. During these times I have been able to ask the Sunday school teachers questions where necessary.

ii) - Overdrive information was collected via participant observation. Being a participant observer gave me the opportunity to question the leader on certain aspects of Overdrive and their general goals with specific activities. Other information was gleaned through the *NLCC Epistles* and general information in the weekly church bulletin.

iii) - Joshua Life information was received from an in-depth questionnaire I sent via email to the two leaders of Joshua Life after an initial discussion with them after the

church service as to the type of information I needed. I could only formulate these questions because I had been a participant observer at first. The 16 questions covered various topics as seen below.

- What is the J-Life method of planning group activities?
- Their procedure for outreach in Perth, the universities or Asia.
- The most successful methods they found to involve the youth in the church.
- The importance of prayer and the use of ministry gifts were covered in the questions.
- Particular methods for encouraging the youth to study the Word.
- The J-Life understanding of the Great Commission.
- The methods J-Life uses to nurture students who are new in the faith.
- I also asked about the structures put in place to support international students when they go home for holidays to Asia.

Other information was gleaned from the *NLCC Epistles* as well as the weekly church bulletin and handouts on activities given to the youth in the church.

iv) - Twelve Stones information was gleaned from a discussion with the leader of Twelve Stones after I had been a participant observer for some time. The idea was to observe first and ask questions where needed in the discussion with the leader. I met the leader after church for the discussion and he sent more information via

email. Other information was collected from the *NLCC Epistles*, church bulletins and general handouts and invitations given to Twelve Stone members.

v) - The Worship Team proved the most difficult to get information from. They arrive at church long before the service begins and tend to be busy packing up their instruments after church. After the initial discussion with the team of three interchangeable leaders, it was thought that the best way to get the information I needed was by sending them questionnaires via email. The leaders felt that an emailed questionnaire would be the most convenient way for them to answer the questions in more depth.

The ten questions that the worship team answered in the questionnaire covered topics such as the following.

- The preparation for the service.
- The choice of songs and how they learn new songs and teach new songs to the congregation.
- Is the preparation different for a youth service as opposed to the regular worship service?
- The role of prayer in preparation for leading in worship
- The size of the music group and how often leaders and members participate in worship.
- How does the particular leader for a service feel about being Spirit led and when do they know it is more 'of the flesh'.

- When they lead in worship, do they feel that they are truly worshipping too or just leading the church? What do they understand by the word, 'worship'?

This was a difficult one to answer.

6.2. *Sunday school*

The Sunday school is open to children from two years of age. All Sunday school teachers must be regular church attendants and have attended Christian education classes and be regular attendants at cell groups. All teachers are trained for their position within the Sunday school. Several members are available for teaching and so a teaching roster is available. The Sunday school children are not influenced by the change of teachers because most families attend cell groups and so children know their teachers well and call the teachers 'aunties'. The Sunday school is seen as the future of the church and the teachers are treated with great respect. Many of these teachers cannot attend the regular church service as often as they would like while teaching Sunday school, hence the Christian Education classes that have proved to be popular and also the support of the weekly cell groups.

It is pleasing to see that the Young Adult group fêted the Sunday school teachers by giving them a dinner to remember. The words in the newsletter to the Sunday school were 'we thought we should clothe those who are not usually given much praise and honour with some good old-fashioned love and respect...Without your help, things would not be as smooth during service, and our little ones would be

missing out on the golden truths that you provide week in and week out. May you always know that we are grateful...?'³²⁴

The Sunday school teachers are known as the treasure in the NLCC for their selfless work among the young ones. This dinner is typical of the love shown among members of the NLCC where cooking a meal for somebody is considered a special act of love. Programs for the Sunday school are set out according to suggestions from the pastor. Activities are planned around every lesson. The Sunday school attends the first part of the worship service with the rest of the church and leaves after the pastor has prayed for them. The children leave eagerly to attend their classes, an indication that they enjoy their time in class. The classes take place while the sermon is delivered in the church service. The fact that the first part of the service is shared is typical of the culture of keeping families together – an observable trait within the Asian Christian community. It must be brought to the attention that no ‘mothers’ room’ exists in the church. The Asian believes that babies are part of the family and part of life and so are welcomed into the service. On the mother’s own initiative, she may leave with a baby that is too tearful or unsettled. The small children never disturb the general services, as they appear used to being in the conversation of adults. Maybe this is another outcome of several generations living within one household or of having extended family living close by.

³²⁴ Jason Lim, “Just Do It.” *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 3 (2007): 9.

6.3 Overdrive

The second age group under discussion are the youngsters of high school age. This group is known as “Overdrive”. The Overdrive group stays in the church for the whole church service, but meet as a cell group outside of the regular church service. They have several activities and social functions. Overdrive is a vibrant teenage movement committed to living lifestyles of faith, passion and purity. They are zealous about empowering a generation completely sold out to their Hero – Jesus Christ.³²⁵

We will analyse the activities that Overdrive offers the teenage group.

6.3.1 Cell groups

The youth are encouraged to attend cell where they are taught to keep the Godly standard as well as other Christian teaching. It is important that this group is targeted because of the explicit sex education taught in Australian schools. The chance to lay down the Godly standard to the youth has proved invaluable to these teenagers in an otherwise post-Christian world in which they live.

6.3.2 Defend the faith and evangelism

They are taught to defend their faith. The starting point has been to educate them in the basics of the Gospel. A thorough understanding of the Bible is a good basis for defence of the faith. Programs to teach evangelism are presented in order to make them more comfortable with reaching out to the lost of a similar age, in their school and neighbourhood. An example of one of their programs is known as ‘The Orange

³²⁵ Amanda Tan, “Overdrive” *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 1 (2006): 9.

Effect'. The Overdrive group were encouraged by the leader to go beyond their usual 'comfort zone' and do something good for somebody at their school or in their neighbourhood. They were challenged to encourage that person to do a similar act for somebody else. This exercise was a challenge because most teenagers do not like moving outside of their so-called comfort zone. Many of the group witnessed about the opportunity their 'self-less act' opened so that they could share the Gospel.

6.3.3 Team players

Being a team player is emphasised through social functions such as roller blade outings, movie nights and lunches. It is during these activities that the Overdrive youth are encouraged to bring non-Christians. It has proved that these functions show the post-Christian Australian youth that Christianity is fun and Christians are normal. God-filled adults who avail themselves to counselling and outreach as the occasion arises always attend these activities.

6.3.4 Pot-blesses

The Overdrive group often meets for a *pot-bless* during the year³²⁶. These family occasions are well attended by the rest of the Overdrive member's family. The function of pot-bless is to get families to converse that may otherwise not attend the same adult cell group and also to introduce the younger members of the attendant's family to the Overdrive group. This encourages the younger family members to start attending the Overdrive group as soon as they reach that age. A wonderful way of

³²⁶ Pot-bless are occasions when everyone attending brings a pot or plate of food to share with the group.

introducing non-Christian youngsters to family activities has been through the pot-
less gatherings. Within the Australian society, parents often work long hours or
shifts and do not make much time for their teenage children, hence the drug and
alcohol problem in the 12-18 year age bracket. Australian children have been forced
to keep themselves busy with video games and other activities with other friends
who are often unsupervised. They seldom seem to have input of close family.

Through the Overdrive outreach the church has given stability to teenagers who are
lonely. They learn in a practical way that Jesus loves them. It goes without saying
that this is how the church is further built up. The new friend is then encouraged
either to come with them to church or to attend their nearest place of worship.

Often other Asian families are brought into the NLCC in this way where the family
has never been exposed to Christianity but the children have met through Overdrive
and invited the teenager to church.

6.3.5 Building God's Kingdom at home and abroad

It is wonderful to see that nobody is forced to attend NLCC even if his or her children
attend Overdrive. The NLCC is about furthering God's Kingdom through the Great
Commission and not merely building up membership of a local church. Members of
Overdrive are also encouraged to go on mission with the church. It has been proved
that the best person to reach out to a teenager is another teenager.

The Overdrive group attends annual Perth events. One of the most popular events is
the January conference of Planet Shakers. Planet Shakers is a group of Spirit filled
men and women from Southern Cross College who endeavour to raise up Christian

leaders among the youth. They have conferences in all the major centres across the nation. Both national and international speakers participate each year. Conferences are planned a year ahead with many of the youth making use of the early registration deals for the following year. This four-day event is held before the start of the school year. It may be attended by over 10 000 youth during those four days. Every night a rally is held where it is open to all youth to attend free of charge. The day events need to be registered for beforehand in order to attend the classes of interest. These classes cover – high school outreach, outreach at university campus and other enriching programs such as Holy Spirit, Worship, Music and Drama and Counselling the Youth.

All youth groups of the NLCC attend the evening rallies. NLCC members of these groups are placed throughout the audience in pairs to pray for those who make a commitment at the altar call, irrespective of the church the new Christian will attend. Within the Planet Shakers conferences we see all the churches working together as one to further the Great Commission. When churches work together then follow-up of the new Christian is more thorough because they will be encouraged to attend a church nearest and most convenient to their dwelling.

Another annual Perth event is a Youth Alive Rally called Adrenalin. This is held for one evening in which up to 8000 youth attend. This rally brings God to the youth in a strange/unusual way such as with motorbike stunts and dances. This rally is aimed at the un-churched youth who may attend. An altar call is held at the end of the meeting and members of youth groups such as Overdrive are dotted throughout the audience to pray for those who want to make a commitment.

It must be noted that the youth groups of the church are encouraged to attend different rallies and the church usually takes bookings for those interested to attend. This way a group booking keeps costs down and facilitates transport arrangements to the venue. The groups usually have a period of time in which they intercede for the event they are going to attend. They believe that more souls are harvested when God's anointing is upon the proceedings.

6.4 *Joshua Life*

This group is fondly known as the J-Lifers. The name comes from Joshua of the Bible, who was the first person of a new generation of God's people to trust in Him, so that he could lead His people into the Promised Land. Joshua Life aims to be a new generation of God's people who will show that same trust, as they look forward to amazing things He has promised. Joshua Life is made up of the young adults who attend university. Perth has 5 universities so all are included in this group.

Joshua Life, from now on referred to as J-Life, started off as a campus outreach of the NLCC for the University of Western Australia or (UWA). The church still holds its Sunday services within the UWA grounds. Presently J-Life consists of all the university cells: that is, all university students attending cell groups. The mission for J-Life was "drawing youth and young adults into a rising body of strong passionate believers committed to encourage and equip one another in living our lives in the abundance of Christ."

This was further summed up in the maxim, “Living the Life in Christ – Liberated...Intimate...Fruitful...Evangelistic!”³²⁷

J-Life is seen as an integral part of the Australian Asian Churches Network and is also guild affiliated at the University of Western Australia and Curtin University.

The year starts off on campus with Orientation Day (O-Day). A stall of the NLCC is set up and manned by J-Lifers. The stall is an outreach where J-Life information as well as general church information is handed out. The stall tries to attract the students walking past by handing out free foods and other treats. They are packaged in a bag that the student may take with them to read later. Outreach events are held during this time and advertised accordingly.

6.4.1 Joshua Life events

The following can be listed:

- Beach afternoons and volleyball attract students at the beginning of the university year.
- Barbecue lunches on campus (students always enjoy free food). These are popular events because students who live further afield in the city are also made aware of Joshua Life.
- Paintball events and other games to break the ice and get people bonding.
- The fortnightly Saturday youth service is advertised. This service is held early evening to attract the greatest number of youth. The worship team who perform

³²⁷ Sarah Ong and James Seow, “Milestones of NLCC” *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 2 (2006): 7.

popular Christian music runs the service and God's Word is taught in a youth-friendly way.

- Quarterly J-Life Throngs are held where further outreach to non-Christian youth is encouraged through an afternoon of fun, games and snacks. All activities are free of charge and sponsored by J-Life fund-raising. A 'throng' is an afternoon outreach whereby all members are encouraged to bring non-Christians to an event that would appear to be essentially 'non-Christian' to the untrained eye. In this way, students who are unfamiliar with Christianity can come to know Christians in a non-threatening environment.

The above events are advertised at O-Day to attract the youth to the church.

Throughout the year the J-Lifers have various programs to keep the youth involved. These activities often involve movie nights where the J-Life team book out an entire movie theatre and sell tickets to raise funds for future events. A typical example was the Star Wars Episode 3 shown by the J-Life youth before it was officially released.

6.4.2 Camps

The NLCC church camp originally began as a J-Life activity. It is held over the Easter weekend each year as well as in September/October long weekends. This camp has proved so popular that it is open to the whole church to attend. Guest speakers attend the camp to encourage the youth. Every year they have a theme according to the calling of the guest speaker. It has become known that those who attend have come back changed and spiritually renewed. Those who thought that they were 'saved' have often come back having made a new commitment to serve God.

We have also witnessed the camp being open to people merely interested in ‘taking a look at Christianity’. The Easter camp of 2007 saw a Hindi girl make a life commitment to Jesus. This girl had attended church on the invitation of another university student who is a member of NLCC. The Hindi girl heard about the camp during announcements in church and expressed interest in attending the camp. The pastor was overjoyed to have a non-Christian attend the camp. He knew that the “Spirit of God would take care of all things.” This particular ex-Hindi girl said that the way Christianity was explained made perfect sense, however what spoke the loudest was the fact that everyone loved and accepted one another. She was stirred by the way the youngsters prayed. She commented that she had heard elderly Hindi people call out like that to their gods when they know that they are about to die. These youngsters at church camp were fervently pleading with God to save the nations. She said that she was so moved in her spirit that she knew God is real and alive. She saw God’s love for her nation who is lost in Hinduism. As an international student, this was not even an experience she considered, but God knew and granted her mercy and grace.

Church members, who have a calling to serve, attend the J-Life camp to cater for the youth. This camp is known for its wonderful food. The youth have taken this catering a step further. A group within the J-Lifers has formed the so-called Crossfire Catering Group. They are using their love of cooking to raise funds for J-Life. They are invited to church member’s homes to cater for between four and ten people. They present a menu and the family buys the ingredients. The Crossfire group goes to cook at the house they are serving. The money made from cooking and serving is

used to further youth activities within J-Life. The Crossfire group is in popular demand among the young professionals who invite guests to their home but due to their busy lifestyle, do not have the time to cook.

The J-Life group has proved to be a strong force within the church to bring youth to church. Australian universities have a certain quota of international students, mostly from Asia. This is where the J-Life group has proved invaluable in bringing the youth from Asia to Christ. Often the international students have never been exposed to Christianity and feel lost in a new country. The NLCC is largely Asian and this makes outreach easy because there is a certain understanding of the culture and language.

6.4.3 Nurture the students

J-Life does not only function as an outreach, but also as a nurturing group for the new members. The different university cell groups within the J-Life make it easy for students to attend the cell nearest to their place of residence. The cell leader and associate leader have been trained to nurture new Christians and especially those far from family and familiar faces. The cell group becomes their family and the J-Life and NLCC becomes their extended family. Now we see why all the cooking activities are so popular. Familiar food, as they would normally eat in their homes, is available. The Asian culture stresses that the sharing of a meal together is part of life and an expression of love. The international/new student feels loved and nurtured. The NLCC believes that this is what Jesus would do. They liken it to Jesus feeding the crowds both spiritually and physically.

6.4.4 J-Life service and discipleship

During the interview with and subsequent questionnaire sent to the leadership of J-Life it was interesting to find the following.

The J-Lifers felt that it is important to create a service that is relevant to the youth. The service needs to be of such a nature that when the youth bring their friends along, whether they are Christian or optimistically known as pre-Christian, they will see that God enjoys a cheerful worshipper. The J-Life leadership felt that there is a definite way to target a specific group. The environment will create differences hence the Gospel is presented in a different style at open day at university to reaching out in Perth and on an outreach during a mission trip to Asia.

About 75% of the youth in the church are members of J-Life. The leaders believe that all members have a gift or talent that allows them to be effective in service. The task of the leadership is to encourage them to use these and become involved in the work and life giving power of God. They are challenged to serve and also guided to fulfil their dreams. Resources are provided to make their dreams happen.

Prayer is considered to be of major importance in the youth group. The leadership have seen the difference that prayer makes in the outcome of outreach programs. The leadership all agreed that God's plan of the Great Commission is a plan of reconciling this world to Himself. They feel that it is imperative to focus on discipleship in the church because the natural fruit of discipleship is outreach. They also believe that it is important to be informed on God's Word and to model that

Word to the youth. One leader's comment about the Great Commission was that "...God commanded all those who know Him to make it happen, there is no plan B."

When asked what impact J-Life has had on the NLCC, the leadership answered accordingly. "J-Life is the passion centre of the church, the future of the church as they train up the youth to walk in God's way." They also see J-Life as the spearhead of Christianity heading into Asia as the International students go back 'home' for university holidays or permanently after graduation.

6.5 *Twelve Stones*

The Twelve Stones young adult group is made up of young working adults. The Twelve Stones became so popular that it recently divided into Twelves Stones I and II. Even more recently the third branch of Twelve Stones was born. The age range within this group covers the 20-35 year age groups. The reason for the overlap of the age between J-Life and Twelve Stones is due to the fact that some young adults study shorter courses at university and so enter working life at an earlier age. An interesting trait of this group is that many young adults are not married in their early thirties. The Twelve Stones group started as Young Adults 1 and 2 (YA 1 and YA 2). YA 1 were known for their love of good food and YA 2 for their love of fast cars. The Twelve Stone leader, a young doctor, suggested that they get some exercise such as playing badminton to keep the weight off after the good meals shared together. What started off as an activity to keep the weight down and the young adults busy, has now become the best outreach for this group. God has provided a window of opportunity to reach out to non-Christian players and so the church has started to grow even further in this age group. They have the most time to reach out after work

and during work hours to non-Christians as opposed to the J-Lifers who need to study after lectures. The Twelve Stones group seems to have the most activity within the church.

6.5.1 Twelve Stone activities

- A weekly badminton night is held that has become an outreach to non-Christians.
- Young people's brunches and barbecues are a regular feature on the calendar in order to keep outreach at a social level.
- Quiz nights where Twelve Stones members invite non-Christians to their 'table' to participate in the evening quiz
- Several retreats are held during the year for spiritual refreshment and fellowship. These usually take place over a long weekend on a farm outside Perth that is owned by one of the church members.
- Seminars are also held that may be of interest to this age group, such as, "Finding a life partner."

Several doctors in the Twelve Stones group offer their services during Adrenalin and Planet Shakers conferences where they man the first aid stations. They also go on mission with the church to do medical work in the clinics in Asia. Several dentists also use their qualifications on mission in Asia.

6.5.2 Twelve Stones mission statement

The Twelve Stones mission statement is “acknowledging my yesterday, embracing our today, and fulfilling His tomorrow.”³²⁸

The Twelve Stones group, in spite of their love for food, often spend a weekend in prayer and fasting. They have based this on the following Bible verse:

Deuteronomy 4:6 “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we PRAY to Him?” They understand that God holds them in the palm of His hand – their yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is why the best agenda is to commit their all to Him – their past, present and future.

Further they have based this group on the following verses.³²⁹

a. Acknowledging my yesterday – Joshua 4:6-7

... in the future, when your children ask you, “What do these stones mean?” Tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a MEMORIAL to the people of Israel forever.

They felt that this verse shows that God had a purpose in everything and that He has prepared in advance for them to take the land i.e. to bring Christianity to others. In effect they bring God to the average post-Christian Australian and further into Asia.

³²⁸ Sandy Wadjaja, “Twelve Hours, Twelve Stones Prayer Chain,” *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 3 (2007), 8

³²⁹ Sandy Widjaja, “Twelve Hours, Twelve Stones Prayer Chain.” *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 3 (2007): 8.

b. Embracing our today – Joshua 4:8

“So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.”

The Twelve Stones group felt the tribes were the different facets of their Christian life – their church, young adult ministry and respective cells and themselves that God will teach each to respect and serve their elders, be accountable for their ministry, encourage fellow cell members and persevere during tough times. The group performed a so-called ‘prophetic action’ by taking twelve stones and piling them onto one another in a monument style.³³⁰ They did this on a farm retreat. Twelve Stones felt this was a humbling and enlightening occasion. They felt that it was symbolic of the fact that many people working together can make a difference, each in his or her own way, with their particular gift or calling from God.

c. Fulfilling His tomorrow – Joshua 4:24

“He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might ALWAYS FEAR the Lord your God.”

While the Twelve Stones group give thanks for yesterday and live for today, they look forward to tomorrow with hope. They commit the future of the church; their ministry and cell groups and themselves into His hands that they, as His children, may CARRY OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION and that they may grow into the likeness

³³⁰ Prophetic action- is an activity that someone or group feels God is leading them to do. Prophetic action happened several times in the Bible, including 2 Kings 13:15-19 where Elisha told King Jehoash to shoot arrows through the open window to the east.

of His image. I believe that this statement embraces what the NLCC believes and carries out. They are striving to be a people of God, reaching out and completing the Great Commission. In so doing they are saturating their lives with Him. The Twelve Stones is a graduation away from the J-Life to a people who have indeed crossed over from being university students to working life. The same passion they had as J-Lifers at university, feverishly spreading God's Word throughout the campus, is seen in their passion for spreading God's Word in the marketplace.

6.6 *The worship team of the NLCC*

The worship team of the NLCC has progressed from a particular group of individuals to several interchangeable members. The reason for this is that a greater number of people have joined the music team in their capacity to sing or play a musical instrument. In having a greater number of musicians to draw from, the worship team has been able to rotate duty to several different members. This has allowed certain students to have time off during exam time or during times when they go back to Asia during their university holidays. Many students, on graduation, leave to go back to Asia permanently. The large musician group allows for these departures in that there will be a replacement and the worship continues. However, these talented musicians can bring Christian worship music to Asia, where churches or house churches are in dire need of this talent.

The worship team felt that the popular music they played could play a great part in bringing youth into the church. The youth could identify with the type of music and so they were not afraid to bring non-Christian friends to church. Even if the friend did not know the gospel, they would enjoy the music. The youth services on a

Saturday, often provided for by the J-Life team, serve as an outreach to the campus and are characterized by the music that is even livelier than the songs of a Sunday morning.

The older church members are used to the worship songs and do not find them too youthful. They felt that serving God in a contemporary way is a sign of the times. In days gone by, the historic church was characterized by rejection of new ways, and so ended up being irrelevant in society. In fact the older members enjoy the worship so much, that they prefer worship services mid-morning combined with the youth of the church, as stated earlier.

During interviews with the three worship team leaders, it became clear that the worship team is always open to all who want to join, whether they are already skilled in an instrument or not. The only prerequisite for members of the worship team is that they be committed to the NLCC and have a heart to worship. The church often appeals for more members to join the worship group and there is always a list ready to sign up immediately after the service. Team members are encouraged to practice on their own to become more accomplished players because practice time as a team is limited. Most of the members are encouraged to take up a second instrument.

Preparation time is a Wednesday evening and a Sunday morning before the worship service begins. On a Wednesday the aim is to teach and expand on both old and new songs while fostering an atmosphere of unity, teamwork and heartfelt worship. Mutual prayer and free worship start these music practices, and they practice the songs for the Sunday. The same procedure is followed on a Sunday morning. They have all stressed that without prayer, they cannot dedicate themselves and their

instruments to be used by God. They stressed that their practice sessions are rather seen as worship sessions and an expression of their worship by giving their best to the Lord.

The worship leaders and co-leader for that week's service choose songs. There is occasional input from the pastor. Everyone has a chance to be the worship leader for the week and they have all stressed the importance of being Spirit-led while choosing songs. The leaders say that 90% of the music team mentioned that they were led to choose certain songs because of their time spent with God that they then used during their free worship time at the beginning of their session. These songs often became those chosen for the Sunday. It has been apparent to church members that the music has always suited the message preached that day – indicating that the Spirit has indeed led the worship team.

The musicians felt that they take cues from the worship leader as needed but that the leader needs to feel Spirit-led during the service. They felt that they could call it a sense of direction of the Spirit. During these times the congregation often broke forth into singing in tongues spontaneously.

The worship team tries to learn a new song every three weeks. They all felt that they were not serving the church family as much as they are serving God when they worship. They all felt that worship is a gift from God that they need to use in order to honour Him.

They all felt that intercessory prayer before leading others in worship is paramount in order to lead others into 'deep' worship. One leader mentioned that he would not

dare to lead unless he had spent time in prayer, because he is a vessel of the Holy Spirit. However, they all felt that they do not really 'lead' others in worship *per se*, but rather they need to be sensitive to the Spirit and so be an instrument in His hands. Often they are led to speak between songs to bring a 'word' from God, but as a rule the music flows from one song to the next. A comment by one member could sum up the gift of worship. He said that 'it is really important that as a leader you need to be a worshipper yourself before you can lead others.'

The worship team has a Worship Retreat every few months in which the whole team comes together to pray and ascertain a concrete vision to cling to for the months ahead. They prayed that they would have an encounter with God, where like King David; they would cultivate passion for worship and in turn bring this passion into the church as whole.³³¹ The worship team are working on a CD to be released later in the year. They hope to create a unique NLCC worship identity by doing so and to testify of God's greatness and faithfulness to the church. At this point I realised that the NLCC understanding of worship was broader than music ministry only. This finding is discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Of specific note is the fact that the pastor and elders appear to have little say in the different youth groups. They are taught to be accountable to all members of their groups and to the pastor and eldership. The pastor and eldership know exactly what is taking place in various groups but they feel that each person has been put within their particular gifting and also are led by the Holy Spirit. The pastor feels that each person has great potential in God and that he would not interfere unless he felt to

³³¹ Patrick Yeoh, "Project Update", *New Life City Church Epistles*, Winter 06, Issue 1,8

do so by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This leads one to realise that as each person is released into his or her area of talent and Spiritual gift, that person begins to grow even more through the use of the gift. Associate leaders begin to train alongside the leader. This is Biblical because God will always raise up leaders within the group. It is of special note here that there is no 'sheep stealing' that is, the attracting of members of other churches to this church because of their ministry. The ministry of each individual is encouraged and cultivated within the NLCC. This reminds us of the Scriptural law of reaping and sowing. As the NLCC sows into the lives of the people to raise up new leaders and associate leaders, so they reap the benefits of having released people into their ministry.

6.7 Discussion outcome

The discussion with the various leaders of the youth groups and worship team has led to the following conclusions.

- Mature adults who take children's ministry seriously teach the Sunday school. It is not seen as an activity to get kids out of the church but as a God-given opportunity to teach the children about God. The Asian culture is known for its desire to make every opportunity a learning and studying occasion. They do not miss the opportunity to educate the children in the Godly standard. The parents enjoy the family time in the service before the children go for their lessons; this appears to knit the families together. The Sunday school is considered a vital part of the Christian walk of the children and is well supported by all parents.

- The Overdrive group is learning to reach out to non-Christians while they are taught to defend their faith. When they get to the J-Life stage, they are well versed in Christian standards and can make a difference, wherever they may choose to study or work. God is not mentioned in Australian state schools unless the student asks a question about God or the Bible. Teachers are not permitted to discuss religion. Most teachers do not know how to answer questions about God accurately because they have not been exposed to church.
- The Overdrive group makes a difference in its age group for the very reason that they know God's Word and love to share it. Children may share their beliefs at school, but teachers may not. Overdrive is best at approaching school going teenagers to bring them to activities and invariably to include their families into the outreach and so bring more young families into the church. Teenagers are best at evangelising other teenagers. The Overdrive group is a strong group where Christian standards are stressed and upheld. The outreach the Overdrive group is involved in has strengthened the individuals within the group in their Christian walk. They are an enthusiastic group looking forward to their days on campus with J-Life.
- As a participant observer, the most surprising observation I made about the group is that they are prepared to go on mission to various parts of Asia where they could minister to other teenagers. The mission-mindedness of the NLCC is already instilled in the 12-18 year age group. This would explain the eagerness to attend mission trips in later years.

- J-Life has played a powerful role in the campus scene of particularly, the University of Western Australia and Curtin University. Their outreach programs have been a safe haven for many lost young international students. Local Australian students have obviously also benefited from the youth services and cell groups. J-Life has also provided wisdom and prayer back-up to first-generation Christians who go home to Asia. Often the Asian family back home does not understand the change in the student. J-Life has prayer partners who can stand with the new believers and strengthen them should the family in Asia be less understanding. J-Life is alive on the campus, represented in most classes by at least one member. J-Life is therefore part of campus life. That which is visible makes a difference. Fresh signs and posters are put up regularly and so outreach is most effective. Youth services take place on campus on a Saturday making it easy to attend for those in nearby areas of university residences. Church services are held on a Sunday in a lecture theatre, making it very easy for international students in residences to walk to church. J-Life stresses the Great Commission as the word of Jesus to reach out to everyone. In reaching out, the leader stressed that disciples need to be made of those who are already there; otherwise outreach becomes too difficult. The outreach arm of J-Life is important in bringing the new youth into the church.
- However, it is quite another challenge to nurture and keep the youth within the church. As a participant observer, I have noticed that J-Life nurtures their members through the various stages of conversion. J-Life is not satisfied with a student who has made a commitment to take Jesus as their Saviour; they

want to see that commitment lived out in a life of conversion. The J-Life maxim (quoted earlier) to see the student liberated or set free from past bondage, to observe the liberated student have a intimate relationship with Jesus, to be fruitful in their Christian walk and be evangelistic.

I noticed that the J-Life group takes this maxim seriously in that students are encouraged to have a deeper or more intimate relationship with Jesus by getting to know the Word better. It was encouraging to see a youth group that does not only have fun – but sees the seriousness of knowing the Word and implementing it in life. I observed the great joy and celebration when new young people came to church. They were publicly welcomed. The encouragement was even greater when the newcomer made a life commitment to follow Jesus. There was no shortage of helping hands and shoulders to lean on. I saw great hope for the church in the attitude of the J-Life group. The youth is after all, the future of the church.

- The Twelve Stones group has gone through the J-Life stage of campus life and outreach. Their mission statement (quoted earlier) keeps this group focussed on that which God has called them to do. As a participant observer I noticed that the statement ‘embracing our today’ proves to be true for the Twelve Stones team. They make use of every opportunity to reach out to others in accordance with the church’s dream to be wall-less and spread the Word, as Jesus desired when He invited all to participate in the Great Commission. The Great Commission is the Twelve Stone group ‘fulfilling His tomorrow’ as seen in their mission statement. The Twelve Stone members are usually settled in their first jobs or professional placements. They have the greatest powers to reach out because

their group activities are geared toward inviting the non-Christian to social activities outside the bar and club scene. Doctors in the group have found Christian principles invaluable in their work in the hospitals where tragedies happen daily and they are able to 'speak into the life' of those who are shocked or lost. Many of these doctors in private practice have issued written statements at their practices, stating clearly that they are upholding Christian principles and therefore will not write referrals for termination of pregnancy. However, the statement also declares that the doctors will counsel women in need of advice.

- The Worship Team leadership's strongest character trait appears to be the importance they lay on being totally led by the Holy Spirit, not only in the church service, but even in their preparation for the service. I observed the awe for God in that they prepare in prayer first before picking up an instrument. I was surprised that the leaders mentioned that the music team feel that they are instruments of worship in God's hands. They give themselves fully to Him and His desire for a particular service. I perceive as a participant observer that the worship team has a major role to play in the NLCC. They do not only lead in worship, but their musical expertise has proved invaluable in being a draw-card to the church for the youth who have not had a church up-bringing. Their joy in serving God reaches across the age groups within the NLCC.

6.8 Summary

From the above study we can deduce that every age group within the NLCC plays a vital role in completing the Great Commission. Each group takes evangelism

seriously and uses the situation that they are in to their greatest advantage in bringing God's Word to others. We can learn from the NLCC that every group has Godly potential. Good grounding in Sunday school and Christian Education classes before church services form the basis on which the groups function. Every group has been adequately cared for within the context of what the church has to offer, that is, everybody is able to defend their faith and lead new believers to Christ with confidence. The youthful worship team walk in holiness rather than merely putting on a performance. They see themselves as a ministry team, not just a music team. Music in youth services is accompanied by fervent teaching of the Word. In contrast, Gilley suggests that contemporary worship is more egocentric than theocentric.³³² The youth believe that they have something to offer the church and know they can make a difference.

The NLCC knows that they can complete the Great Commission, person by person. These findings emphasise the importance of mobilizing the youth within the church as discussed by Mott in his article, *The Responsibility of the Young People for the Evangelization of the World*.³³³ Rainer suggested in his article, *The Great Commission to Reach a New Generation*, that key leadership positions in the church today should be those who teach the youth of the church. He believes these positions have been neglected at the cost of losing the impressionable youth who have not learned about their faith because the present youth in the church have

³³² Gary Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (USA: Webster, Evangelical Press, 2005),83

³³³ John R Mott, "The Responsibility of the Young People for the Evangelization of the World." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 317

been neglected by Biblically illiterate parents.³³⁴ This statement ties in well with the Australian situation as discussed earlier. However, in Asia a different scenario unfolds, according to Aikman who suggests that China's cities have large numbers of young believers without a tradition and few mature Christians to nurture them. The reason is that the older generation usually remains in the country areas.³³⁵ In contrast, Lambert claims that Marxists disallowed that children under 18 be taught about Christianity. Country areas have few young Christians and an ageing Christian population.³³⁶ Rainer and Aikman's concern for teaching the youth in order that they may evangelise others, ties in with the NLCC theory that the youth must be allowed to minister in their respective calling because they are agents for the Kingdom now. They do not need to wait until they mature in age. This concept appears to be uncommon in some churches, especially the more traditional churches.

³³⁴ Thom Rainer, "The Great Commission to Reach a New Generation," *Who Will be Saved*, Paul R House and Gregory A Thornbury (Illinois: Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2000), 193-207

³³⁵ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*. (UK: Abingdon, Marston Books, 2005), 117

³³⁶ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (UK: Abingdon, Monarch Books, 2006), 146-149

CHAPTER 7

THE NEW LIFE CITY CHURCH AND MISSION

As mentioned previously, The New Life City Church (NLCC) appears to be a wall-less church in the sense that it seems larger outside of the four walls in which they meet for worship. The NLCC does not confine worship of God to the activities done within the four walls of the church on a Sunday. Worship of God, to the NLCC member, includes reverence of God throughout daily life and throughout the week. Therefore they can be seen to be in continuous praise, worship and outreach to all people, hence the suggestion that they are a wall-less church. NLCC has many activities during the week that they themselves see as part of their worship life, but the emphasis NLCC has on being so outward reaching makes them appear wall-less.

Most of the people attending NLCC have been on mission at some stage. This important feature is one of the most noteworthy character traits of the NLCC. The NLCC has a large percentage of people from all age groups, who go on mission every year. They take the order of Jesus regarding the making of disciples seriously. It is important that those who have been on mission are interviewed to see the dynamics of the extent of the outreach at NLCC. We should bear in mind that mission does not only include those who have gone overseas, as in, left the country to do outreach. Mission also includes those who have a calling to evangelise the lost within the Perth area. However, for the purposes of this part of the study, those who had left the country on mission in Asia were questioned. For more information on the returned

missionaries and the questions they answered see under the section referring to the 'Cross Section of NLCC Missionaries Interviewed'.

Generally speaking, the perception exists that many Western churches do not send missionaries out from their congregations on a regular basis, preferring rather to support missionaries in their overseas posts. This support may include financial contributions, guidance by the umbrella church organization involved in the mission and by prayer support. As a participant observer I have seen that the NLCC sends missionaries out to Asia and still supports mission in those areas that they visited. This study will include the way they approach mission and also the outcome of the missions undertaken. The NLCC is an autonomous church so therefore all missions funding comes from within this particular congregation and not from an overhead/umbrella structure. The perception I get is that the NLCC self-funds mission outreach to areas in Asia because they feel it is the calling of Jesus to complete the Great Commission.

7.1 *Missions committee*

The NLCC has a Missions Committee consisting of six individuals from different backgrounds and interests. They have the common interest of being passionate about sharing the Good News of God to a dying world. The committee is responsible for directing the efforts of the NLCC into the mission fields. There are three aspects to the directing of their efforts. The one aspect is the Mission-Sending aspect, the other the Missions-Involved aspect and thirdly the Missions-Partnering church aspect.

The *NLCC Epistles* stated the following as the goals of the missions committee for 2007 and 2008.³³⁷

1. Mobilising NLCC cells to 'adopt' unreached people groups or countries.
2. Raising \$40 000 for mission trips, activities and support of evangelism work.
3. Equipping and sending out "one family unit" of NLCC missionaries by 2011 and "two family units" by 2014.
4. Planting two churches in Asia by 2011
5. "Focussing on Cambodia, China and Sabah, Malaysia through the sending of annual NLCC Mission Impact teams, building working relationships with local missionaries and partner organizations in these countries."

Mission awareness months are held in May or early June each year to raise the awareness of the mission work done by the NLCC in the previous year. At the same time the mission awareness months also aims to introduce new areas for the congregation to focus on for the forthcoming year. Usually two locations are introduced and the Sundays in that month are held as prayer points.

7.2 Cross section of NLCC missionaries interviewed

I chose to interview twelve returned missionaries. These twelve returned missionaries represented every mission team that has gone out from the NLCC. My

³³⁷ Missions Committee, "Ministry Focus: Missions – Our House is Full, but the Fields are Empty" *New Life City Church Epistles*, Issue 5 (2007): 4.

The NLCC Epistles is a quarterly newsletter the church prints informing the congregation of activities the church presented, such as youth news, missions new and cell group news. The Epistles also informs the congregation of events that will take place in the future.

reason for 'covering' all the mission trips was that every mission trip is different and I wanted to achieve an overall view of mission trips. It should be mentioned that five of this group of twelve had been on only one mission trip each. One member had been on two mission trips. Another member had been on three mission trips. Two members had been on four mission trips. Another two members had been on five mission trips each and yet another member on six mission trips altogether.

I approached each mission group to a particular area for the initial interview on their experiences of the mission trip. After the initial discussion each group opted to answer the questions in more detail via a questionnaire sent by email.

Twelve people were questioned on their experience and role on missions. Eleven are from an Asian background and only one was Caucasian. The Caucasian was chosen specifically so that comparisons could be made in the outcome of the interviews. The Caucasian Christian is a first-generation Christian. He surely represents the typical Westerner in a post-Christian country.

The twelve people questioned included ten first-generation Christians, none of whom were in the first group of first-generation Christians referred to in a previous chapter. The reason for this was to include more people in the study so that the result could include a broader cross-section of the NLCC.

The study included nine men and three women from NLCC. Men and women were included in this group to see if there were differences in how they experienced mission and the outcomes of their mission trips. Their ages ranged from undergraduate students in their early twenties to professional people in their fifties.

The reason for choosing the wider age range was to prevent any discrepancies occurring from results only showing those who have been on mission many times. The group questioned included some who had recently returned from their first mission trip. Some of the group had been on mission several times over a period of time. It would be interesting to see if first-time missionaries experienced their mission trips differently from the seasoned missionary in NLCC.

Eleven of the twelve people interviewed had family still living in Asia. The only Caucasian interviewed has no family living in Asia. We should ask the question: whether Christians prefer to go back to their own countries on mission and whether the language and culture plays a role in witnessing in another country. It needs to be pointed out that Asian countries have many dialects within one area of a particular country. Just because somebody is of Asian appearance, does not mean that they understand the language/dialect of the area to which they are sent on mission.

7.3 Questions answered by the returned missionaries interviewed

These are some of the questions that needed to be answered in this study.

1. How does the church send out so many on missions?
2. What motivates people to want to go on mission?
3. How do the people prepare for mission?
4. Who decides the destination of the particular mission team?
5. How does a particular group get together for mission?
6. Who decides who may go on mission – being mature enough for mission, so-to-speak?

7. How is the actual mission trip planned?
8. What are the criteria of a successful mission trip? Who or what decides the success of a mission trip?

7.3.1 How does the church send out so many people on missions?

The result of the interviews suggested that no particular people had been approached specifically to go on mission. During church services the pastor had often put out a challenge encouraging people to experience mission. In other words, giving of one-self and not just sending finances to a worthy cause. The fact that people were not specifically approached as possible potential missionaries made all members feel that they could go on mission. They are encouraged by the fact that the messages stress the Godly potential of each person, then every person realises that, no matter how mature/immature they are in their Christian walk, they may make a difference to at least one person they meet on mission. All interviewees felt that they grew more spiritually when they went on mission. They explained that mission was not only about giving of oneself, but growing in oneself or maturing spiritually during the challenge of being in a foreign area to share the Gospel.

From the above statement we can deduce that all members of the NLCC felt included in the call to go on mission. Nobody felt excluded from the mission and outreach arm of the church. This had the effect of making people believe that they could all go on mission and indeed, all had been called by God Himself to complete the Great Commission. The congregation felt encouraged to go on mission through sermons challenging them to complete the Great Commission as well as through services dedicated to missions once a year in which people were encouraged to pledge

financial help towards the mission projects for the year. Past missionaries all had a chance to share their mission experience with the church during services throughout the year. These shared mission experiences stirred others to participate in upcoming missions.

With future visits to certain areas in view, the pastor also shared DVD material that the scouts may have brought back from the initial field trip, before the actual mission team left for those areas. In this way many people felt led by the Holy Spirit to a particular mission in an area that the Lord had laid on their hearts.

Informative talks on the needs of a particular area also encouraged others to join the mission to a certain area if they felt that they could meet a particular need. For example, medical and dental students were often motivated to join a medical mission to a particular area. They accompanied qualified doctors and dentists from the congregation. Engineers in the congregation were encouraged to go to areas that needed pure water or buildings erected in areas of need. An example would be the Cambodia mission of 2008 that set up water purifiers. The NLCC scouts had heard about the need for pure water among the people living on boats in polluted rivers. A pastor from Cambodia was invited to Australia to speak about their plight after the NLCC pastor had visited the area. In other words, the initial mission trip was to spread the Gospel. The subsequent result was further outreach to a wider area to provide pure water. NLCC believes that this is how God opens doors for them. The area initially earmarked for evangelism grew to a huge area where the NLCC was invited. When one is welcomed into a particular area, the way is open for the Gospel to be accepted by the local populace.

7.3.2 The call to mission – the motivation

Every mission trip is planned differently, depending on the needs of the local populace. Sometimes the mission trip calls for those with medical qualifications and at other times it may be aimed at areas where there is a need to speak to young people. Before a mission trip to an area, the pastor does an extensive study of the area, often relying on other pastors in the areas concerned to send him information. One of the more seasoned missionaries of NLCC may go to the area as a 'scout' to analyse the area they wish to target for mission. The process of '*scouting*' is Biblically referred to as 'spying out the lie of the land.'³³⁸

The church sponsors full time university students who go on mission trips. Due to the fact that most of the church is made up of regular overseas travellers, they have a wonderful way of finding the best flight deals. The package includes meals and accommodation, although these are usually extremely basic. The whole group had stated that they had to sleep on floors in churches on many occasions, but this fact has made them appreciate so much more the blessings they have in their lives. Groups are encouraged to travel light and to be prepared to leave behind all they have to bless others. Most have taken extra clothes and stationery on the mission trip to leave behind for those less privileged. They believe that as Jesus fed the people and preached the Gospel, so they too must bless those who are hungry or naked and then bring the Good News. Christian literature is not usually taken with them because of the risk of confiscation at some airports. They usually only carry that which they can legitimately claim as their own and for their own use.

³³⁸ Joshua 2:2 In this passage we read that Joshua took two spies from Shittim to analyse the situation in the land they were going in to possess.

Sometimes they do leave these behind – provided that the locals can understand the language. As explained earlier, Asia covers a vast area with many different languages and dialects.

The aim of these mission trips is to show the love of Jesus to the local people, to bring the Good News and to leave the people with a blessing, to continue to carry them in prayer and to support them in whatever way the Lord provides.

Several of the people questioned have medical qualifications. Clinics are operated in several areas. Medical equipment is usually taken on mission and left there for the use of the local people. NLCC continues to support these clinics on a regular basis.

Two of the group said that they had been encouraged by the reports from returned missionaries to go on mission. Both of these young men are postgraduate students. They are committed, active members of the church who have been active in youth leadership roles. The pastor and other members who had previously gone on mission inspired them to get involved. They both stated that they would go on mission again when the opportunity arose. They both felt that the mission experience prepared them for the first-generation international students coming to the NLCC when they came to study in Perth.

Three of the members felt the call to rise up to the pastor's challenge. They felt the need to go on mission during worship services after they had seen DVD footage of previous mission trips. This group included a man and woman classified as working adults and a final year male student. Two of the group mentioned that they felt distinctly that it was God's calling. One of these included the Caucasian and the

other an experienced mission team member from NLCC. They had both always felt that God would use them in Asia to glorify His Name.

Three more members mentioned that they were led to go on mission after much prayer and intercession and waiting for God to give them a 'vision' for that particular mission. This group included a husband and wife team who go on mission regularly and a young working adult. They felt that they had made themselves available to God, and He provided the motivation. Two more of this group felt the need to go on mission to reach out to the poor. They are a husband and wife team who feel the need to help practically and not just to bring the Word to the people.

The answers given by the group for their reason or motivation for going on mission is as diverse as their characters. The reasons for going on mission ranged from the desire to meet a need in the mission area to simply making themselves available to hear God call them to an area where He desired to use them.

7.3.3 Preparation for mission

Nine of the twelve people questioned had extensive preparation before going out on mission. The preparation before the mission trips included the following.

7.3.3.1 Dramas and skits

Dramas and skits are performed to build up group dynamics. The 'returned missionaries' felt that this helped them to interact with one another. They also become more familiar with one another – especially the different age groups. The Asian has great respect for the elders of the congregation. By elders I mean those who are more senior in age. Having said this, the youth have their own cell groups,

which would explain the fact that the different age groups do not interact intensively on a weekly basis outside of church services. The dramas and skits provide an opportunity for all age groups to interact. Group dynamics are extremely important in foreign areas where a whole group can be put at risk if any member tries to work outside the group.

7.3.3.2 Protocol

The pastor informs them of the protocol of the particular area. The pastor gets his information from people living in that area and others who may have been on mission in that area previously. The scout who had gone out to spy the land returns with valuable information. It is vital not to offend people in an area. The Gospel needs to go out in a loving way, Jesus being our perfect example of approaching people. The returned missionaries all found that being inoffensive in their approach, made the local population accept the Good News more easily. The returned missionaries all agreed that when the local population accept the missionary – then they accept the Gospel message more readily.

7.3.3.3 Language

The language of the area needs to be considered. The different dialects in even a small, localized area make it difficult to prepare to overcome the language barrier. Usually a pastor from the local area and his elders meets the mission team and travels with them into the areas. They interpret the language. Often these pastors are overworked, spreading themselves over vast areas. These pastors consider any outside input as a blessing sent by God. Most of the Asian pastors serve large areas,

but these areas are also often densely populated. Sometimes an area covered by one pastor can have as many as one hundred thousand members making up a home church network. NLCC members who speak a dialect often teach the other team members if this dialect is deemed to be useful in the area the mission is planning to visit on that particular outreach.

7.3.3.4 Weekly meetings

Weekly meetings are held to prepare the team for the mission trip. Part of the equipping for mission is fervent prayer. Many of the group questioned felt that the prayer was the most important aspect of preparation for missions. They feel that through prayer, God prepares the people in that area to receive the Gospel. In other words, prayer is a two way street – prayer prepares missionaries to share the Gospel, but it also prepares the hearts of the people to accept the Gospel.

All of the returned missionaries felt that preparing for mission meant being sharpened in the Spirit to watch for ways of constantly bringing the gift of Christ to others. They felt that if they watched prayerfully and expected the Holy Spirit to ‘show-up’ He, in fact, did in the most miraculous ways. Seasoned missionaries of NLCC described how different every mission trip is and that no mere program or set pattern can prepare a group for mission. They felt fervent prayer and total reliance on the Holy Spirit to prepare them for mission is of great importance.

The other three members of the group who did not go through the preparation process had a different approach. The one is a husband and wife team who have been on mission many times. They usually go into the areas before the mission team

and on returning give the information to the pastor so that he can prepare the group for mission. They do give some input in the preparation meetings. It should be pointed out that this husband and wife team are considered the most senior and seasoned missionaries. This praying couple keep up their correspondence with the Asian pastors at all times so that they may know of areas of need so that they may alert the NLCC to needs in Asia.

The third member of this group was the Caucasian. He had not attended any mission preparation classes because he is actually not a member of the NLCC. The fact that he is a member of another church in another city did not deter him from joining the mission. He was made to feel most welcome by the pastor and all the elders when he inquired about going on mission. He had previously been on mission to Asia as a young, newly qualified doctor. He had always anticipated that God would send him on mission to Asia again. The fact that he is a member of another congregation demonstrates the openness of the NLCC to reaching out to others. The pastor of the NLCC comments that all Christians need to realise that they have Godly potential to go on mission. It is all about God, not about making a name for the church. The Caucasian man met the mission team over a weekend and all briefing took place via emails from then onwards.

7.3.4 The destination of the mission

7.3.4.1 Pastoral input

The pastor has a calling for mission on his own life. He has seen that mission is not only a way to grow a church, but also a way of growing individuals within a church.

The stronger the Christians in the church, the stronger the church and so God's Kingdom grows. As a participant observer, I got the impression from the pastor's sermons that he sees mission from a Kingdom perspective. Mission to Asia will not add numbers to the church, but this does not seem to be the important motivation for mission in this instance. In his sermons, the pastor stresses that all Christians are responsible for the lost wherever they may be. Many churches aim to grow within their town or suburb; the NLCC feels the need to grow the whole Kingdom of God. The fact that these mission trips take them thousands of kilometres from the NLCC church does not seem to matter. They all see the outreach as part of the worship of God and also as part of the church's activities. Those interviewed likened mission trips as part of the worship of God, as weekly cell groups are part of the worship.

7.3.4.2 Prayer

Intensive prayer and intercession is vital in planning mission trips. The pastor is in contact with many small groups of Christians throughout Asia. It can be likened to a network of groups that make contact about needs in a specific area. An area is prayed about and if there is an indication that God wants a mission team sent there, the scouts are sent out to check the land.

One may ask, how does God indicate where the mission team must go? Usually opportunities arise within an area where several small Christian groups need help and input. We must remember that the pastors in many of these areas have never been to Bible school. They serve large areas and are often relying on the goodwill of the local people to survive. During intercession, God brings several areas to the prayer group's attention. This is fondly known as 'doors open'. Once the

intercession team realises that God is opening the doors to an area, the pastor and elders can communicate, often via email, with overseeing pastors to those areas. The needs of the area are taken into consideration. In this way, the spiritual need is not the only need met, but certainly, the physical needs of the local Christian and non-Christian populace. For example, in a particular area, there may be the need for Christian literature or the need for local pastors to be taught or the need for medical help. These needs are usually communicated to the NLCC beforehand. All needs are met prayerfully. By this is meant that needs are prayed about and met according to the will of God.

7.3.4.3 Dangerous areas

It must be pointed out that there are more dangerous areas where the pastor himself often gets invited to spend some time. Such areas may be politically unstable or reluctant to have Christians travelling in the area. He may take the more experienced/seasoned missionaries on mission with him on these trips. Usually the exact area is not known to the whole NLCC for security reasons. Facts about these trips are shared afterwards with the church, thus furthering the interest in missionary outreach. All so-called secret missions have avid prayer backup from the NLCC church members in specific intercession groups formed for that purpose. An example of a mission that was undertaken with much care was the mission to Cambodia in 2008.

Two dentists and a doctor headed the Cambodia mission. Several church members were trained to be dental assistants before going on mission. The dental clinic was set up in a seminary school. The mission team found that the area they ministered to

had problems with underweight children and sick adults because of the lack of food in the area. The mission team covered areas from rural villages to floating schools and markets. The returned missionaries gladly admit that without their Khmer language interpreter, the Cambodian people would never have known why they were there or why they were loved. The group spoke about the unity of the team in working hard in the area of need, but coming away feeling utterly blessed by God. They felt that their calling was to serve the people who needed help – not to impress anyone with Biblical knowledge and know-how.

A previous trip to Cambodia was to a more isolated area in dire need of medical help where the patients waited patiently in sweltering heat. The 'clinic' was simply three stations set up under the roof of the local church and school where the patients were divided into three groups. One section was for the doctors to screen the patients, another for prayer and ministering to them, and the third for dispensing medication. Outside this area, children sang worship songs. These songs were the first introduction to the Gospel for many of the people present. At the end of the day, the medical staff would end with singing praises, reading God's Word and sharing testimonies. Most people stayed and listened. Many devoted their lives to Jesus each day. Once again, the mission group felt they were there to serve, and God would do the rest.

7.3.4.4 Taxing missions

The pastor always informs the church as to which mission trip could be more taxing physically. The trips into rural, mountainous areas where fitness is a factor could deter certain people from going on mission to that particular area. For example a

trip encouraging the younger adults on mission in 2006/7 to Sabah included climbing some of the highest mountains in the area. Young adults who enjoy adventure and sleeping outdoors enjoyed this particular mission trip because they reached out to the young adults of that area. The Sabah pastors had appealed for help for their young adults to have more contact with young Christians from NLCC.

The Sabah mission was deemed a great success because of the scale of outreach undertaken in areas completely forgotten by other missionary organizations. The missionaries from NLCC found young people who were hungry to hear God's Word. This particular group found that God used them to perform worship songs, play games and skits and even dance with the local population. In the process they experienced a miracle in their midst. A water dispenser, which appeared to have no water in it, continued to supply water needed until the last person had a cup of water from it. God touched many lives that day as the people were exposed to God's awesome power. These signs and wonders, accompanied by the preaching of the Word, brought many people to commit their lives to Jesus. In the process, the NLCC missionaries were also strengthened in their faith as they saw God's power and anointing.

7.3.4.5 Medical mission

A 2006 mission trip to China was also a medical mission. The reason for this is because the Chinese government is suspicious of anything from the so-called outside world. In fact, the mission team was greeted by dancing women and a television crew. This is China's way of keeping anything foreign out in the open so that foreigners are exposed from the start. The doctors on this trip specifically went to

do ophthalmology.³³⁹ The comment made by a Chinese professor to one of the young NLCC ophthalmologists was “... if you spent the next 30 years of your life here, doing 30 cataract operations per day, 7 days a week, you wouldn’t even touch the need that is here for eye surgery.”³⁴⁰ During this trip many people came to devote their lives to the Lord as they saw the love and care with which the Christian doctors from NLCC treated them.

Another mission trip to China in 2008 saw ten NLCC members start in Guangzhou and proceed to Kunming to meet local church members. The missionaries met people involved in training ministers, church-planting networks and other community-based agencies. The NLCC missionaries wanted to pinpoint the needs of the Chinese church on this trip. They found children sleeping in classrooms on broken tables because they did not have the money for the transport to go home during the week. Living conditions were sparse with one working tap and no toilets or bathing facilities. Children cooked their own meals over open fires – the staple food being rice. The team was able to pray with the locals in their hour of need and see how the Gospel empowers people to see beyond their present circumstances, to God’s greater plan for them.

The team from NLCC attended house churches. They described the worship and prayer at every service to be intense. The comment the team made was the following, “...no one doubted the Chinese Christians’ passion, energy and love!”³⁴¹

³³⁹ Ophthalmology is a section in medicine that specialises in all diseases relating to the eye. It also includes eye procedures and operations.

³⁴⁰ Jason Lim, “The Fire in China,” *New Life City Church Epistles* issue 1 (2006): 6.

³⁴¹ NLCC 2008 China Mission Team, “Missions to China,” *New Life City Church Epistles* issue 9 (2006), 8.

In other words, the destination of the mission is entirely planned by prayer, the need for service in an area, and willing people who are able to avail themselves for a time in areas of need. The service to others is tempered with a desire to serve God totally as they bring their talents and training to the altar of the mission field.

7.3.5 The forming of the group for mission

7.3.5.1 Prayer

Prayer was mentioned as the single most important factor for mission group formation. Individuals, who feel a calling from God to go on mission, are encouraged to continue to pray about their trip. Meanwhile the mission leader for that particular trip speaks to those who are interested and encourage them in prayer and seeking God for His will for them. The mission leader also shares with those interested in the particular trip so that they are fully informed when they make their final decision. The leader also plans the flights to the area. These include subsidised flights of full-time university students who are called to mission.

7.3.5.2 Core group equipping

Once the core group for a particular mission trip has formed, the group leader will start to involve the group in the preparation. The preparation will include icebreakers for individuals to get to know one another and corporate prayer to knit the group together. Dramas and skits are fun, but they expose the personalities of the individuals and so they begin to get to know one another.

Equipping for mission during the meetings also takes place. By equipping is meant that the members are told what to expect about the area and so are prepared to

meet the needs. This bonds them as a team. The protocol of a particular area needs to be highlighted clearly, as the group must never offend the culture of the area. Offence in itself does not only close the gospel to the area, but it may be a security risk too. Although 99% of NLCC are Asian people, they may look like the local populace where they go on mission, but they are not the same. Asia is made up of many different people groups and the mission teams need to be informed about local culture so that they do not cause offence.

7.3.5.3 Needs of the area

The mission leader has the information on the needs of the area the mission group is going to visit. These needs are shared with the group and individuals begin to be led by God to take up certain positions within the group or they may feel that they can meet a particular need. For example, a medical student may feel the need to meet some of the medical needs within the clinic that the medical missionaries are going to set up. Some people feel the call to meet the needs of the children within an area and so are led by God to take certain materials with them to teach children to read, write, colour pictures or even to teach the local women to set up day care schools.

7.3.5.4 Different roles

The NLCC believes that God raises people up within a group to take on a particular role or position in the group on a particular trip. This means that God uses people differently on the different mission trips. No mission trip is ever the same as a previous trip because God seems to have a season for each person to take on a particular role. The interviewees all believed that God used them differently on each

trip so that they could mature in different aspects of Christianity. Some returned missionaries commented that they might have shared the Gospel to individuals on a particular trip, only to lead worship on another trip. Sometimes the medical teams are used more for spiritual matters than physical matters. All those interviewed felt that God leads the mission outreach each time. This is why they felt that prayer was vital in planning the mission trip. They felt that if they did not hear God, they could easily miss the opportunity God had planned for them on a particular mission.

Certain mission trips may include areas with high prostitution rates. The female members of the group have found that they may 'reach' the prostitutes spiritually better than the male members of the group. This may seem obvious, but this does stress the importance of having mixed gender groups for the full message of the Kingdom of God to go out to the unreached areas.

In the interviews, when asked how the group was formed, the answer has always been that God brought the group together. Sometimes members have commented that their personal idiosyncrasies have been in the way of the group – but that God has even dealt with this. In other words, as the Kingdom of God grows by mission, so the individuals of the mission grow into the Kingdom of God.

7.3.6 Who goes on mission?

All members of the NLCC are encouraged to go on mission at some stage. Nobody has ever been barred from mission because of so-called spiritual immaturity or personality. In fact, the NLCC expects all members to realise that evangelism means the guiding of a lost soul to Christ. In a particular sermon before a mission trip it was

pointed out that evangelism is the pointing of a person in the direction of Christ, not just leading them to making a commitment. In the same sermon, it was stressed that relationship with those you want to lead to Christ is paramount.

The illustration given was as follows. In any relationship, people get to know one another first, and then they decide if they 'want to go out with that person'. Only later they may decide to marry that person. Marriage is a commitment but it is also a covenant with the other person. Making a commitment to follow Jesus for the rest of one's life is a life commitment as marriage is. In this way, committing to Christ is a covenant with Christ, as is marriage. Nobody is expected to make a commitment to marry somebody the first day they meet. In the same way, on any evangelism outreach or mission, missionaries are discouraged from putting pressure on people to commit.

Therefore those called to mission must be prepared to befriend the local population first. In doing so, they can point the way to Jesus in their whole way of being, not just by sharing the Gospel and expecting snap decisions for Jesus. The popular saying in the NLCC is – 'you cannot date and marry Jesus in one day.'

Every person is viewed as having potential in God to make a difference on a mission trip. Prayer has been mentioned by 100% of returned missionaries, as the most important activity before and during mission. Prayer decides who goes on mission – because God answers prayer.

7.3.7 Planning the mission trip

7.3.7.1 Initial scouting

Once the pastor has been told of an area of need, the scouts are sent out to survey the area. It is vital to have contact with the pastors in the local area. The scouts go to those pastors during their trip to see for themselves the conditions and needs of the area. Usually scouts combine several areas on one scouting trip so that several mission trips are identified for the year. Mission trips are spaced throughout the year to give everyone the opportunity of attending an area they feel called by God to go to. Mission trips where there is a need among the youth in an area are obviously planned during university holidays so as to encourage the youth of the church to attend a particular trip. Youth identifies better with the needs of the youth of a particular area. Some mission trips are advertised as youth mission trips, however, there is always an older adult in attendance. The older adult will always be an experienced missionary and mature in the Word.

7.3.7.2 Limited place

Usually a limited number of places are available for the mission trip. Often the trip is into a rural area only reached by four-wheel drive. In some cases only two vehicles are available, so only eight individuals per vehicle of which the vehicles would include a local guide or pastor/elder. This means that for that particular trip numbers are limited by the availability of transport.

The mission group takes limited number of personal items, most of which are left behind to bless the local people. Sleeping bags are used, as the mission never includes hotel accommodation. Accommodation is very basic, on the floor of a schoolroom or church. Returned missionaries have commented that they usually sleep under some form of roof, while often the local people give up their place and sleep outside in the open in order to honour God's people. All returned missionaries remember this aspect of their trip being a particularly humbling experience.

7.3.7.3 The areas covered by mission trips during 2004-2008

- The areas of Kathmandu in Nepal, Chiang Mai in Thailand and Macedonia were visited on mission. Other areas included Bali, Sabah, Tanjong Pinang, China, Taiwan, Yunnan (in China), Bangkok Hadyai, Indonesia, and Cambodia.
- The Bali and Sabah missions concentrated on the needs of the young people in those areas. The NLCC missionaries who went on these trips were mostly young people with adult supervision.
- The China mission was mostly to meet medical and dental needs. The medical mission was specialized into eye surgery and heart diseases. Some areas of China visited were to support persecuted churches. For obvious reasons these areas cannot be mentioned here.
- Chiang Mai mission was to support the plight of child prostitutes and poverty-stricken children and their families.
- The Cambodia missions were to help set up water purifiers in some areas and help the plight of people living in houseboats. Other missions to

that area have been medical and dental. It should be understood that every mission undertaken by the NLCC is to meet a need of the area as well as to preach the Gospel. All missionaries understand that they go in the capacity of servant of God.

7.3.8 What are the criteria of a successful mission trip?

The group felt that the most successful mission trips were always those where the following criteria were met:

- Where the whole group was knit together in one mind in Christ to reach out to the local people.
- Where fervent prayer before, during and after the trip played a major role.
- Where all members of the group were finely tuned to the needs of the members of the group. An example mentioned was that if one of the group members was unwell, somebody else could take over their role seamlessly and with a cheerful heart.
- When the group was prepared to enter the unknown by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they were prepared to step outside of their own comfort zones to meet the needs of the local people.
- When the whole group 'heard' God in many different ways, but yet it was a confirmation of what their fellow missionaries had received from God. The time of sharing before the day's activities proved to be very important. This way they could share what God had spoken to

them. During these times they often found a common theme that God was bringing to mind.

- They also felt that the debriefing period at the end of each day was important too. During the time of debriefing they could easily identify group members who needed prayer, additional guidance or encouragement. The debriefing period helped the group share their experiences of God. This intensified their faith in God. Often the experiences others in the group had, showed them how God was working through the group.
- They felt encouraged in the way that God used them during mission trips. All of the returned missionaries felt that they had grown more in their walk with the Lord. In other words, in spite of going on mission to share God's word, they had in fact taken great steps in their own relationship with God.

The most interesting aspect of the feedback from the returned missionaries was that all the Asian people felt that they had achieved something, however small on mission. However, the returned Western missionary felt that more intense mission work should have been done.

When this comment was discussed, they all felt that Gospel preaching only, without showing interest and love in the community would make the Gospel appear false. In other words, they show respect for the local area and its population. Love the people for who they are and who they will become in Jesus. The returned missionaries believe that this is an act of faith that the unbeliever needs to see.

Bring the Gospel gently with love and grace and then the Holy Spirit does the rest.

They felt that when we try too hard in our own right to organize and bring the Gospel in a certain way, it appears as if the Holy Spirit takes a back seat, usually without the result that could have been achieved because the anointing of the Holy Spirit has been left out of the equation.

While it is true that only one Westerner went on mission with the mostly Asian NLCC team, we need to question whether all Westerners would have had the same sentiment. We cannot form a definite conclusion that Westerners want to specifically see results and make a difference immediately; but it raises the question whether this could be an important difference in the approach to mission between an Asian group and a largely Western group. The question to be asked is: Does the Western church see mission as a huge task where they want to see results immediately in order to legitimise the mission? It is not within the reaches of this study to come to a scientific conclusion.

This aspect could be an important difference in the approach to mission work between the Western Christian and the Asian Christian. My opinion is that the Westerner appears to be driven by 'achievement' and 'making a difference now' whereas the impression from the answers gleaned from the returned missionaries is that the Asian missionaries approached mission outreach more subtly and with what could be seen as a far greater faith in what God will achieve in and through them, even after they have already left the area. It appears as if the Asian Christian is happy to sow into the Kingdom of God and see the result in heaven one day. They see mission as an outreach where they give of themselves while they bring the

Gospel and then leave the area in God's hands so that He may bring the increase. In this way, no particular church gets the credit for evangelising the area. The area is seen as an area saved by God for God in order to establish His Kingdom. All missions are to God's glory in order that His name is glorified. No church or individual shall take the glory.

The NLCC see mission outreach in the church as not merely the sending of finances to support missionaries. Mission outreach of the church is the sending of the church, to give of itself, so that God may be glorified. The ultimate goal of mission is to see God glorified as more people come to know Jesus as Saviour. This is the growth of the church, because it is the expansion of the Kingdom of God. The church is the Christian in motion, spreading the Gospel as they give of themselves to the glory of God Almighty. After all, a hallmark of a wall-less church is to take the Great Commission seriously. Churches that never reach outside their walls can never stand at judgment and declare that they have carried out Jesus' orders to complete the Great Commission.

The returned missionaries discussed the order of Jesus in Matthew 28 to go out and make disciples of all nations. They understood the order of the Great Commission to be as follows:

Go out and MAKE DISCIPLES – training ministers and leaders on the ground where mission took place. Any young Christian has the potential to be a leader in Christ's harvest.

Of ALL NATIONS – do you hear God’s call? Churches need to spend time in prayer and hear where the call and need is greatest. The need may not be greatest overseas; it may be in the local country in which the particular church finds itself.

BAPTISING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT – this is an action ministry. All the returned missionaries interviewed believed that making a decision to follow Jesus is a moment in time. Conversion is a life-long journey where Christians are changing daily as the Holy Spirit leads them. Baptism is an important step towards the conversion process. All members interviewed believed that baptism must be done as soon as the decision to follow Jesus is made. The act of baptism is an act of changing citizenship to God’s Kingdom and following His way. All the old ways have to fall aside. Fervent discipleship teaches the new converts the ways of God.

TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU – teaching the Word is obedience to the Great Commission. The Word must fall on fertile ground. The group believes that the ground can only be fertile if baptism has taken place. Merely making a commitment to follow Jesus is not enough to encourage the Word to grow within the individual. Baptism is taken more seriously than merely a verbal commitment. This fact rings true especially in areas of persecution where the act of baptism can so easily lead to martyrdom.

AND I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS TO THE END OF THE AGE – a walk in faith as the conversion takes hold in the lives of the newly baptised disciples. The walk of faith in God may be tested at any time. The returned missionaries from the NLCC mentioned that they could feel God’s presence at all times. His presence was felt when they

had devotions at the beginning and end of each day. They also felt His presence while they ministered to people or simply served the people in whatever capacity they were called to. One returned missionary mentioned that she felt God's presence mightily when she felt ill and the group came to pray for her. She felt so loved by God that she was soon able to resume her service within the group that day.

7.4 Outcome of interviews

- a. The Great Commission is a serious order

All 12 interviewees felt that the church needs to take the Great Commission seriously. The Great Commission cannot be completed when the church is complacent and comfortable within its four walls. They felt that the church needs to be mobile and reaching out to the very ends of the earth. Jesus is with us wherever we go. We should use His presence and power to reach out to those who are lost. The interviews suggested to the researcher that NLCC is wall-less because it is in continuous praise and outreach on a daily basis, and not just on a Sunday.

All the NLCC members felt included in the call to mission. All members could decide for themselves on which particular trip they wanted to be included. They could make informed decisions because of the coverage given to mission trips during corporate worship. All members felt involved in mission because they could continue to be involved in the area they had visited. The returned missionaries never felt under pressure to perform on mission trips and 'save' as many people as they

could. They all went on mission because they love God and want to worship Him and glorify Him by pointing others to Him.

The interviewees agreed that God does not expect us to perform perfect mission trips, rather, He expects us to reach outside of our comfort zones to teach others about Him. In so doing He blesses the missionary by growing them further in the Spirit. All the returned missionaries agreed that age is not a factor when going on mission. The young students found that God could use them well in outreach to other youth in areas not usually reached by other missionary groups. They felt that they were able to reach, in a spiritual sense, the youth of the country. The older members in the group felt that they made a difference in reaching people who could identify with them as 'more mature citizens'.

b. Mission trips have different flavours

The seasoned missionaries believe that every mission trip is different and that only God can prepare each person for the particular mission they intend going on. They cited prayer as the single most important activity for mission preparation. First time missionaries did not feel that they were at a disadvantage when compared to the seasoned missionaries. They realised that every mission trip is different and that God uses each person in a different capacity within any given mission trip.

c. Language

The Asian members of the group realised that language problems could arise, but that the love of God shines through any situation.

7.5 Interpretation of data regarding mission trips

Ten of the twelve members contacted after their return from mission were first-generation Christians. Eleven of the 12 members had family still living in Asia. The 12th member of the group interviewed is Caucasian but had previously been on mission to Asia, but does not have family residing in Asia, only some friends.

Two of the 12 interviewees felt that the church, because of the interesting way the returned missionaries spoke about their trips, invited them. They felt the need to share the Gospel with others and also share in the adventure of going to areas of need. One was a student at the time and thought that lack of finances would keep him from serving in missions. God provided in a miraculous way and this illustration of provision of God forms part of his testimony to the church. This testimony has been encouraging to other full time students.

Three of the interviewees felt that the way the pastor presented mission and the need to complete the Great Commission inspired them to take up the challenge of going on mission. Two people felt that the Lord had called them on mission. They had been moved by the plight shown in the church on DVD about the need in certain areas and had prayed about it and felt God stir them to go on mission. Three other members also felt that they needed to pray and ask God to give them a vision for where He wanted them to serve Him before they could approach the pastor and state their interest in going on mission. These three members are older members of the congregation and thought they needed to hear very clearly from God because they were not sure if they could keep up physically with the group. Two of the group

interviewed felt they needed to go to areas that were very poor. They were moved by the plight of children living in poverty.

Mission trips are planned to include meeting a need in a particular area. The NLCC missionaries are called by God to meet this need so the group forms through the promptings of the Holy Spirit after earnest prayer.

The group interviewed showed that 98% of the returned missionaries do not believe that only Asians should go on mission to Asia. Those who felt that only Asians should go on mission to Asia were the same individuals who found the language and culture of an area challenging and had wondered if the local populace would rather trust somebody who could actually speak their language. However, everyone else said that God opens doors where no mere human can. They felt that love and the Gospel, rather than language touches people. The only Caucasian in the group felt that most of the Asian missionaries felt they were reaching the people in a different manner to the Westerner.

Only 75% of the returned missionaries upheld the area they had been on mission to in prayer. The remaining 25% said they prayed about the people in that area when God brought them to mind, but did not do so on a daily basis. As high as 99% of the returned missionaries felt that being so-called "Spirit-filled" was not a necessity for going on mission. The returned missionaries all felt that they had grown in Spirit while on mission. The general comment of the group was that if the missionary were not Spirit-filled beforehand the Holy Spirit certainly would fill them during the mission trip. All of the returned missionaries felt that they trusted God more, their

faith had grown more and they all felt God's love surround them wherever they went on mission.

We need to remember the earlier comment that the goal of the mission trip is to cement relationships with the local population. During the time of getting to know the people, the Gospel is shared but no person forced to make a commitment to become a Christian. The commitment stage is considered as a great step in making a covenant with Jesus for the rest of their lives. A surprising 99% of the returned missionaries did not consider making a commitment for Jesus as their only goal. They seemed to have a far broader view of mission and the role of the missionary. They felt that they were called to an area as God's servants to love the people, meet whatever needs God called them to meet and to bring the Gospel of salvation to those they minister to in their capacity as servants of God.

7.6 Summary

From the above information gleaned from the returned missionaries, the following conclusions are made. All the returned missionaries believe that they grew spiritually on the mission trip and that their faith was tested but also strengthened. Those who feared they would not cope came back filled to a greater extent with God's love. They felt that their spiritual gifts were intensified during mission trips and some felt that others received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while on the trip. God called the missionary to fulfil a different role every time they went on mission. In other words, God grows us when we make ourselves available to Him.

All who call themselves Christians are called to mission because Jesus left everybody with the order to fulfil the Great Commission. Some will spread God's Word in the area they live, and others will be called to go further afield. There is no such thing as a professional missionary. The interviewees believe they will go on mission wherever God sends them, not necessarily only to Asia. I realised through this study that mission need not merely be goal-directed i.e. to start a church in an area. Having said this, I believe that most churches that do short trip missions or outreach to a local area will anticipate growing their church or starting a new church. The Asian NLCC members were quite happy to serve God and bring His love to the people in whatever capacity they were called by God. They stressed servant-hood as an important character trait for any missionary, because a missionary is called to fulfil a need, often aside from the need to spread God's Word.

Mission preparation was vital on three levels. Prayer was the most vital ingredient mentioned for the preparation of individuals for the trip and secondly, prayer for the area to be visited. It was not only the missionary who needed to be prepared for the trip, but the actual trip needed to be scouted first so that the actual need of the community was met while the gospel was brought to the community. Thirdly, the importance of group preparation cannot be underestimated. I believe that the Caucasian missionary who could not attend preparation for mission missed the point of mission; and that is to bring God's love to people in need. Jesus always met a need, such as healing the sick. In so doing, He met a need and brought the warning of the Kingdom of God being at hand. I believe that further study is needed into the impression given that the single Caucasian interviewed in this group had not

experienced satisfaction on the outcome of the mission trip and felt that the trip should be more goal-directed. One could make the statement that maybe the Western and Asian churches understand mission differently. However, we cannot come to a scientific conclusion in this case due to the limited number of Caucasians interviewed.

The interviewees saw going on mission as an act of worship of God. I believe that when the church sees that worship of God is multifaceted and can be carried out in daily life outside the church, the church will begin to function in the wall-less capacity it is meant to. Individual missionaries grow further in the Lord, and the Kingdom of God grows further when the church becomes mobile and wall-less.

Couch suggests that the church should keep reminding people about mission and the command to make disciples across the nations. He believes in setting goals and training to meet these goals as well as understanding the culture where mission should take place. He sights humility and servant-hood as vital in mission.³⁴² These findings are in keeping with the NLCC returned missionary outcomes in this chapter.

Mittelberg suggests liberating and equipping every believer for outreach. He believes the church members do not take the challenge seriously to be active witnesses for Christ. He calls for 'low-impact' outreach by inviting non-Christians to 'events' without mentioning God. Mittelberg sees this as creating an opportunity for the non-Christian to 'seek' further if they so desire.³⁴³ This is in contrast to the NLCC

³⁴² Mal Couch Ed, *A Biblical Theology of the Church*, (US: Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1999), 249-263

³⁴³ Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*.(Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 152-178,225

members who take up the challenge to be witnesses and meet needs on mission, accompanied by God's love and Word.

Anderson believes that mission rather than ministry will expand God's kingdom and also renew the spiritual life in the church. He suggests mission is centrifugal or forces energy outwards and ministry is centripetal or draws energy inward. His *An Emergent Theology for Emergent Churches*, suggests the churches function as outward-reaching. Reaching out will bring the desired growth because spiritual life is renewed with outreach.³⁴⁴ This is in keeping with the NLCC result from interviews with returned missionaries. The NLCC interviewee findings emphasise the importance of reaching the nations as discussed by Ladd in his article, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Ladd suggests the church is responsible to complete the task and so hasten the day of His return by taking the Great Commission seriously. Ladd explains that the Good News is that Jesus has wrestled authority from Satan and Jesus is waiting for us to complete the mission to all nations. He suggests the mission of the gospel of the Kingdom is our mission.³⁴⁵ Bosch suggests in *Witness to the World*, that if the church is "in Christ" she is involved in mission because her whole existence then has a missionary character. Further, Bosch suggests that mission is more than obeying a command; it is "...a result of an encounter with Christ."³⁴⁶ The NLCC findings in this chapter suggest that mission is not merely obeying the command to complete the

³⁴⁴ Ray S Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Illinois: Downers Grove, IVP Books, 2006), 186

³⁴⁵ George Eldon Ladd, "The Gospel of the Kingdom", *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, Ed. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 64-77

³⁴⁶ David Bosch, "Witness to the World, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, Ed (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 63

Great Commission, but rather a desire to worship God through mission and outreach for His name to be glorified by all people. The interviewees mentioned how Christ changed them on mission trips. These findings emphasise the importance of worship and obedience as key elements of mission as discussed by Bosch.

Hawthorne confirms obedience as an important element of mission because witness was always linked to public declaration of Christ and readiness to suffer for Him. He likens witness to a process, not a brief encounter.³⁴⁷ NLCC interviewees saw mission as a process of meeting a need, establishing relationships and bringing God's Word into the situation so that He may be glorified. This finding is in keeping with Hawthorne's article, *Acts of Obedience*.³⁴⁸ The Brewsters also stress this bonding or establishing of relationships on mission in their article, *The Difference Bonding Makes*.³⁴⁹ However, the emphasis the NLCC interviewees laid on prayer as a vital link in deciding on the mission trip and preparation of individuals and the recipients appears to be less prominent in many writings with the exception of Silviso in his book, *Prayer Evangelism*.³⁵⁰ Students often form the basis of the mission team sent out by the NLCC; this is in keeping with Howard's article on *Student Power in World Missions*, where he demonstrates how, over the centuries, students have been serious about fulfilling the Great Commission.

³⁴⁷ Steven C Hawthorne, "Acts of Obedience," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 123

³⁴⁸ Ibid

³⁴⁹ E Thomas and Elizabeth S Brewster, "The Difference Bonding Makes," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 444

³⁵⁰ Ed Silviso, "Prayer Evangelism," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 152-155

The NLCC as an Asian church understands the culture of Asia, possibly making it easier for mission to these areas. Kraft's article, *Culture, Worldview* shows the importance of Biblical and cultural appropriateness.³⁵¹ However, only Asian Christian churches suggest first-generation Christians go on mission, we seldom hear of this in the Western church. Brother Yun teaches that God requires surrender, obedience and sacrifice and shows that His kingdom advances through human weakness not human strength.³⁵² It is an unusual find in a Western church and unique to the NLCC where the first-generation Christian group forms the bulk of mission teams. We have discussed the importance of Christian education and discipleship as vital elements to mature first-generation Christians to outreach stage. All NLCC members are called to mission without exclusion, creating an atmosphere of a wall-less church.

³⁵¹ Charles H Kraft, "Three Encounters in Christian Witness," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 408

³⁵² Brother Yun, *Living Water*, P Hattaway, ed (Michigan: grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008),11

CHAPTER 8

ROLE OF THE ASIAN NEW LIFE CITY CHURCH PASTOR IN AUSTRALIA'S FIRST WORLD SETTING

Pastor Yat Wan is the senior pastor of the New Life City Church. He is the first pastor to be appointed in this position, as the congregation was serviced by elders and guest preachers for about two years up until the point where the elders felt God prompt them to call a pastor. After fervent prayer they felt the Spirit lead them to extend an invitation to Pastor Yat Wan, who at the time was pastor of a large church in Singapore. He and his wife, also an ordained pastor, had felt that God wanted to move them on to a new challenge and they were waiting for an answer to their prayer petitions when the invitation came from Perth in Australia.

Pastor Yat Wan grew up in a Buddhist home where ancestral worship was commonplace. His sister was the first to become a believer. For a time he persecuted her in many ways before he too accepted Christ on the first night that he attended a Christian youth camp. The fact that Pastor Yat Wan is a first-generation Christian means that we have the opportunity of studying the perceptions of a first-generation Christian about the way that they came to Christ, what they perceive the best methods of outreach of the lost to be and also how a first-generation Christian leads a church. Within the New Life City Church we have the full spectrum of people from first-generation Christians who have matured in the Gospel to new first-generation Christians and those who have grown up in a post-Christian society like

Australia. Could it be that a first-generation Christian pastor understands the post-Christian society more fully?

When a Christian has 'grown up' in the church it could be difficult to perceive how a first-generation Christian understands the Gospel and the difficulties associated with trying to 'catch up' the years of having missed out on Sunday School and other Christian activities that we as Christians all take for granted. The new Christian in the post-Christian society like Australia faces the same difficulties that a first-generation Christian would face. We will investigate how the Christian church leader can best bring the Gospel to these people, how best to nurture the new converts and how to grow a church of dynamic, living stones.

The questions posed to the pastor during the interview were all aimed at answering the above questions.

8.1 The most effective method of salvation

WHAT IN YOUR OPINION IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHOD OF LEADING SOMEBODY TO THE LORD?

The pastor mentioned personal relationships and identifying the needs of people as the most important method of effectively leading somebody to Christ. He cited his own example of a caring, praying sister who persevered and put up with his anti-Christian ways and persecution as the best example he had of forgiveness and love of Christ portrayed through her life toward him and his behaviour. This spoke more clearly than being forced to Christian meetings.

Personal mentoring and discipling was the most effective way in which he grew closer to the Lord. He stressed the importance of follow-up of every individual who makes a commitment to follow God. Once the commitment is made, the conversion process starts, and the church as the body of Christ, needs to stand closely to support the growing new Christians.

8.2 *The call to church involvement*

WHAT, ACCORDING TO THE PASTOR IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE CHURCH?

- The pastor felt that people needed to be made aware of the vision.
- They should be made aware of the needs of the church.
- The members needed to be trained and equipped for ministry.

This means that while people are in church services, they need to be made aware of the vision of the church. God's plan for a particular congregation is the vision for the church. The vision does not come about merely by a group of elders meeting, but rather after earnest prayer, the heartfelt desires of what God wishes to do through the congregation are prayed about and considered. The pastor felt that when congregants are aware of the direction in which a church is moving, they are able to put their prayers and efforts behind that goal. The Asian church believes that every church needs to move in a goal-directed way, or it may become lukewarm and mediocre. The passion for what God plans to do with the group gets lost in the *'house-keeping'* side of the church.³⁵³ The vision of the church can be seen as the

³⁵³ House keeping refers to everyday activities of the church that are not necessarily of a spiritual nature. These activities may cover a vast section of duties, such as paying the bills, printing church bulletins and co-ordinating functions.

calling of the King who appoints a group of people to a task. It is considered an honour and not a chore.

The New Life City Church (NLCC) in particular has a vision or calling for mission.

Mission is not a random sending of people to areas they felt called to, but rather, the realization that every Christian has been called to complete the Great Commission.

While most congregants have relations/family in Asia, the church has a vision for the evangelization of Asia. Every mission team to Asia is sent in a planned and prayerfully considered way (see chapter 7). Relationships are first built up on ground level in the area where the mission team will go. Once again, this demonstrates the importance of relationship as the basis for mission, church and for that matter, Christianity as a whole. All three are intrinsically interlinked. The particular vision of the NLCC in a nutshell is: "A united people with passion and purpose: Loving God-Making Disciples."³⁵⁴

The needs of the church are demonstrated in the daily running of the church.

Sometimes physical needs have to be met, such as hospitality. Other needs could be more spiritual, such as the need to stand with a family in the time of crisis or the need to teach or mentor new Christians.

The fact that members need to be trained and equipped for ministry is an important aspect of the NLCC. Through this study we have seen that all members have the chance to improve their Bible knowledge and everybody is seen as having potential in God. This has proved vital to the NLCC as a so-called wall-less church. Every

³⁵⁴ The vision of the church as referred to above 'in a nutshell' is printed on every church bulletin and newsletter. In this way the church is aware of the vision at all times.

member is equipped to bring the Gospel to a lost world. This means that all members see it as their calling and vision in Christ to move outside of the church walls to spread the Gospel and so bring more people to a saving knowledge of Christ. This is especially important in the post-Christian society in which we live. People may never get to hear about the Gospel, except for somebody from a church feeling confident enough to talk about Jesus. Pastor Yat Wan feels that it is his foremost duty to nurture and equip Christians to reach their full potential in Christ. In this way, all members are able to fulfil their role or calling in their Christian walk.

8.3 Care of first-generation Christians after commitment

IS A FIRST-GENERATION CHRISTIAN LOOKED AFTER DIFFERENTLY WITHIN THE CHURCH ONCE THEY HAVE MADE A COMMITMENT?

Every Christian needs to be nurtured and disciplined within the church family, no matter their background, according to Pastor Yat Wan. This is, Pastor Yat Wan believes, the vital difference between the so-called Western church and the Asian church. Pastor Yat Wan also mentioned baptism of the new convert as soon as possible in order to formalise their entry into the new way of life they have chosen on becoming Christians. He has found that this formalisation into the Christian way is effective in preventing trivialisation of their new commitment to God. Baptisms are carried out publicly, with other brothers and sisters in Christ alongside the newly baptised Christian encouraging them even further on their walk with God.

The Western church expects most Christians to have been exposed in some form to the Gospel. This conclusion often leaves new Christians feeling uncomfortable about joining basic Christian classes. This means that the post-Christian era Christian is often not equipped in the basics of the Gospel; hence they feel they have no right or no confidence to spread the Gospel. They often perceive it to be the minister/pastor or elders' function.

This observation demonstrates the vast difference between the Asian Christians' out-look on equipping classes. Everybody is expected to join these classes at some stage so that they can be more effective Christians in ministering to, or evangelising others. Knowledge of the Gospel is considered a blessing and these classes are seen as a call of God on the life of the individual. The classes have also proved to be good grounding for making lasting friendships and for mentoring others. This means that the church is never seen as a large group of individuals, but rather as a well-trained mission hub of close knit Christians with a vision for completing the Great Commission.

8.4 Church and church growth

HOW DO YOU AS THE PASTOR OF THE NLCC UNDERSTAND CHURCH AND CHURCH GROWTH?

The pastor stated that the best model is found in the book of Acts. The book of Acts stresses the gathering together of the people. That is the ecclesia via worship, community belonging through the small groups, prayer and witnessing as a way of life and equipping. By equipping, he meant the training of the saints for ministry.

The gathering together of the people can only really happen when people are humble enough to admit that they need to come to Christian education classes and learn the basics so that their outreach may be more effective. This humility is seen throughout the Asian church.

Pastor Yat Wan felt church growth needs to be considered firstly as the growth of the individual as they mature and become stronger Christians within the believing community. Stronger Christians become more effective evangelists and this in turn brings growth to the church. He felt that numbers per se does not mean a church is a strong church. A strong church may have fewer numbers but stronger individual Christians who can be more effectively used by God to complete the Great Commission. He believes that those who are in the church must be nurtured first and matured so that they become fishers of men. As they become fishers of men, they too can help to nurture the new Christians within the church community but also outside of the church in daily life. This he believes is true church growth. He feels the church needs to be seen to grow strongly within itself first, before it can be effective in the community. Too many people rely on the altar calls as a 'show' of growth, only to find that the decision to follow Christ has not been followed up with complete conversion and discipleship and therefore, growth and maturity. He feels that the altar call is only the first step in the conversion process.

8.5 NLCC and the wall-less church concept

DOES THE PASTOR SEE THE CHURCH AS WALL-LESS?

The researcher, from a Western point of view, perceives the NLCC to be wall-less.

However, the pastor stated that the NLCC is going through a transition from being a 'walled' church into a church without walls. He states further that it is a process that the church needs to learn and grow more in this particular area. It was interesting to see that the pastor did not feel that they were already wall-less as I had perceived as a Western Christian. He felt that there is room for improvement. He said that he has contact with many churches in Asia and can compare the outreach of NLCC to what the Asian churches are achieving in Asia with far less income and resources.

Continually they look for ways to improve or develop. The fact that the NLCC realises that they are still being moulded by God into that, which He desires for them, seems to keep them humble and focussed on His mission for them and the vision He has set before them.

Pastor Yat Wan understands wall-less to be selflessly reaching out to others in the normal daily life of the Christian. All members needs to be encouraged in their ministry to use that with which God has equipped them to bring others into the kingdom of God. He believes that all members need to be nurtured first and grow in Word knowledge. Word knowledge is imperative for effective mission and outreach. When people get to know the Word of God, they understand that the calling on all believers' lives is to evangelise and spread the Gospel. Mission and outreach can never be left to so-called professionals. Effectively the church becomes wall-less

when every individual understands the calling on his or her life as a disciple of Christ who needs to go out and make further disciples.

Pastor Yat Wan explained that God has called NLCC to be a church without walls, but with doors that are open to everyone. He explained that the ministries of the church must extend beyond the church's borders. He continued further by explaining that in the future the NLCC services and ministries would shift as follows:³⁵⁵ The pastor suggested the following points that would need to be attended to in order to shift the services and ministries of the NLCC:

- i) From living in the past to engaging with the present.

By this he meant that the church must not dwell on past achievements, but live dynamically and be inspired by all future possibilities. He stressed that church must discover its God-given purpose '*with a sense of urgency*.'³⁵⁶

- ii) From market-driven to mission-oriented.

The pastor expanded on this comment by saying that the NLCC needs to "...have a mission for the heartbeat of God rather than a clubhouse mentality." The church is a church that proclaims the Gospel and where members grow as disciples of Christ. By this comment he meant that nobody has 'arrived' so to speak. We are all growing in grace daily as we are led by the Holy Spirit and fed by the Word of God.

- iii) From dead orthodoxy to living faith.

³⁵⁵ The 3 statements made by Pastor Yat Wan were also printed in the *NLCC Epistles* as part of the message from the pastors. *NLCC Epistles* Issue 1 (2006): 2.

³⁵⁶ Sense of urgency- these words could describe the general feeling within the NLCC. Everybody appears to be active and dynamic in witnessing to the unbeliever. The sense of urgency best describes the NLCC's stance that there is much to do as possible as quickly as possible- because the harvest is ready.

Pastor explained the above statement as follows: “We seek to be relevant and sensitive to the community by understanding their perspectives, priorities and needs. We want them to see our faith through our actions.”

The above thoughts from the pastor show the servant heart of the NLCC. The servant heart is carried out into the surrounding community and all the way into Asia on the different mission outreaches. It is important to be sensitive, so to speak, of the community. When a church knows the needs and problems of the community in which it is resident, it is able to address the problems from a Christian perspective. In other words, the church is not a place solely for the congregation of believers; the church is the body of Christ reaching out to a hurting world.

8.6 Church context and church methods used

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO EMPLOY METHODS USED IN YOUR PREVIOUS CHURCH IN THE PERTH CONTEXT AND HAVE THEY BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

The pastor’s previous church was a large church of about 5000 members with a strong missions focus, cell structure and equipping program. They had a visionary leadership style. This was obviously very successful in Singapore and accounts for the fact that the church was huge compared to the NLCC he was called to pastor.

The pastor felt that the Perth context is different in that the infrastructure is weak and leaders have less understanding of ecclesia. The pastor explained that his first few years were spent fine-tuning the vision, which they now have as the fullest form, a leaders’ structure, and constitution that can stand the test of time, and a

community of leaders and members who believe in the vision and purpose. He believes that having implemented the missions' vision of the church is probably the strongest expression of the NLCC at present. He felt that the next step would be to develop more fully the equipping arm of the NLCC and the small group structure.

The above comment by the pastor has led to the following thought. In spite of the previous church being in Singapore, not generally seen as a Christian area, the church there had a better infrastructure than the NLCC in Perth. Obviously the Western church perceives itself to be the best equipped with the largest infrastructure because it is western. This is obviously not the case. There may be two reasons for this: Firstly, NLCC is an essentially Asian church within the Western setting and therefore infrastructure was lacking because the church is catering for a different group of people than the so-called average Western Christian. Secondly, the post-Christian area in which NLCC finds itself has made the infrastructure weak simply because so few Australians appear to be passionate about the Gospel. There are no other large, better known groups reaching out to fledgling Asian churches catering for a need within the community.

The vision of the church, as a wall-less church with a heart that reaches out to others has become the fullest expression of the church. This is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the NLCC is made up of a large group of Asian people who all have family in Asia. They all have the desire to see their family become serving Christians. This burning desire would give them the vision to reach out in mission. Secondly, the pastor has been involved in mission for years. His whole outlook has been one of a missionary, yet he has always pastored churches. It shows in his sermons as they are

well prepared, informative teaching sermons but always delivered with the heart of a missionary.

Pastors can be pastors and missionaries at the same time. A pastor with a missionary heart will always bring the vision to a hungry church that has the heart to see their families saved. In the same way, a missionary with a pastor's heart will always be, I believe, successful in planting churches. The pastor felt that the basic need to mature and disciple people within the church made no difference between his previous large congregation in Singapore and a smaller church in Perth.

Essentially, Christians need to be taught the Word of God, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and be nurtured and undergirded as they grow in faith. The faith cannot be contained within the church context only; it needs to spill out into the daily life of the believer. Therefore, it does not matter in which country one is, or how big the church is, God's word is the same. God's Word has great power and the effect is the same everywhere- the saving of lost souls and the salvation of mankind for all eternity.

However, the people are different in different countries, so the acceptance of the Word of God is different. The pastor found that in Asia where life is tougher, the Word is accepted gratefully, often as the last hope of the person. In Australia, where generally life is not difficult, most people do not search for a higher meaning to life. He found that there is a profound difference in how people search for a higher meaning in life between the Australian and the Asian. In spite of these differences, all people come to a stage where they question life; it is at this point that there is an equal ground for bringing the Gospel to a lost world. He believes that in Australia, as

in Asia, the use of small groups alongside the church services of a Sunday, are imperative for the growth of the individual and ultimately of the body of Christ.

8.7 *Asia and Perth mission: the approach*

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND MISSION TO ASIA AND MISSION/OUTREACH TO PERTH?

ARE DIFFERENT MISSIONARY METHODS EMPLOYED IN DIFFERENT AREAS?

The pastor's answer is as follows:

Since the Lausanne movement, there has been emphasis on un-reached people groups and while this has been good, it has not been easy mobilising local churches to take on the role of missionary to the un-reached people groups, as the work among them is difficult. There is also the need for city reaching and in the past ten years, there have been many efforts in world missions prayer movements that have sprung up which has brought the church into praying and touching the cities. Recently, focus has taken the form of reaching the nation or country by impacting the marketplace, government and business community. All these are movements that prepare the ground for local churches to mobilise and equip their community to take communities. I see a more balanced approach via community efforts, meeting felt needs via social outreaches by planting churches. I do not see different methods but more of a synergy and partnership in sharing resources and personnel.

The above quotation of Pastor Yat Wan demonstrates the essence of the NLCC as a church willing to embrace community efforts and so reach the community. The

church is not an exclusive holy huddle trying to force the Gospel onto people. This thought by the pastor also accounts for the fact that, especially in the case of the youth group, Joshua Life, the outreach into the community has been via games, concerts and youth services that stress modern songs and simply accepting people and loving them into the community of God.

8.8 *Decisions and mission destinations*

HOW IS AN AREA DECIDED UPON WHEN YOU SEND OUT A MISSION TEAM?

The pastor answered:

Firstly, we pray and ask the Lord for a passion and burden. Usually a leader or elder would have the passion or desire for a certain area or country/city and we ask that person to get information and anchor the responsibility to make an exploratory trip to use existing networks or relationships to make connections. Then, we mobilise a team and do a ten to fourteen day exploratory and mission's impact trip. After the initial exploratory trip, we review and pray over whether we should continue the network and relationships and then plan ongoing annual trips as way of follow up and establishing a continuing effort in edifying each other. In some situations, we develop a memo of understanding to be 'sister' churches and relate more by relationships.

Once again relationship is demonstrated as important in outreach. Jesus had the same approach of loving people, accepting the different communities and calling those into service who appeared to be undesirable by worldly standards. Fisherman

and doctors appeared to be the least likely ministers of the Gospel in the New Testament days. Today we could say the same. As Jesus reached out and challenged people to follow Him and become so-called fishers of men, so too, the NLCC calls people of all walks of life to come fishers of men.

8.9 The Great Commission

WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GREAT COMMISSION?

The pastor stated that Matthew 28:18-20 is the key to the Great Commission. The making of disciples would in his opinion be the focus of the Great Commission.

Pastor Yat Wan cited discipleship as an important element in the completion of the Great commission. During university holidays Pastor Yat Wan's wife presents the program called "*Life Track*".³⁵⁷ This program is used to equip people of all walks of life for a deeper walk with God. In the process they learn discipleship and in so doing, the need to reach out beyond their usual circle of influence to impact the world with the Gospel message, and in so doing, to complete the Great Commission.

These Life Track modules are an example of subjects covered by NLCC during university holidays when students are available.³⁵⁸

i) - Do you hear the voice of the Spirit calling you?

In this instance Christians learn to discern God's will for their life.

ii) -Personal disciples

³⁵⁷ Life Track is a program in which people are challenged to draw closer to God through the development of personal disciplines. An encounter with God is not a one-off, but a personal decision to take up our cross daily and walk toward our God-given destinies.

³⁵⁸ These Life Track modules are an example of subjects covered by NLCC during university holidays when students are available.

The Christians learn how Christ walked with His disciples and how we as Christians must walk with and support others in the faith.

iii) -Training in Godliness

This particular module helps Christians to know the Godly standard as well as to identify problem areas in their own lives that may need to be addressed.

iv) -Diligent study of the Word

Knowledge of the Word of God is always encouraged because it equips for life.

v) -The ruthless cutting away of every cumbersome weight.

This module ties in well with the 'Training in Godliness' lessons. All believers have their own spiritual battle against certain temptations. This module teaches them how to address the problem areas.

vi) -God has a great destiny for our church and for the nations. God is looking for those who will pay the price. What about you?

This lesson is a call to take one's stand as a Christian.

The minimum age to join the program is 14 years of age and there is no fee. The program stretches over three days and two nights at camp. An intense training course, as part of the Life Track seminar allowed the students to go on camp for a weekend. During the camp students of the Word were also taught to draw closer to God with the following items.

a) How to prepare devotions

- b) Spiritual warfare
- c) Community transformation
- d) Knowing your Destiny
- e) Who are you? Knowing yourself and others
- f) Mentoring and Discipleship
- g) Spiritual parenting
- h) Bible subject e.g.: Nehemiah
- i) Fasting – the key to open doors!
- j) Hearing God's voice
- k) How to discover your spiritual gifts.

From the above-mentioned topics we could see that the church is inviting young people to be equipped to carry out the Great Commission effectively. An example is the fact that everyone is taught to prepare devotions, an invaluable asset when the youth get together for prayer in the university residences. As the young get used to presenting devotions, they soon take up the challenge to lead a cell group. Spiritual parenting will be used effectively in these groups.

The aspects of mentoring and discipleship go hand in hand with community transformation. People are also trained to expect hard times when carrying out God's work, hence the need to know how to do spiritual warfare.

8.10 Church constitution and understanding of membership

HOW WAS THE CHURCH CONSTITUTION SET UP AND HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

The pastor explained that the church started in 1999 and copied the constitution of another church by just changing the name of the church and the elder's names. It started as a Bible study group that grew into a fellowship and most of the elders had very little understanding of what constituted a church. As the church grew, they needed a full time pastor and when he arrived, it took him two years to revise the constitution into what it is. They changed the concept of elders for life and revised it into a maximum of two terms of three years followed by a one-year sabbatical before an elder can be nominated again.

As regards church membership, pastor explained that they believe that by becoming a member, a believer is committed to support and be part of the ongoing community in the church. Members identify themselves with the vision of the church and make themselves available to be raised up to their fullest potential in their Christian life.

The church is seen as a family where all members can come together as brothers and sisters in Christ. The church offers ongoing support to all the needs that may arise among its members. He continued by explaining that once a person becomes a church member of this particular congregation, he, as the pastor with his eldership, takes the responsibility of nurturing the individual to his fullest potential.

Membership makes it easier to keep track of contact details of church attendants and for future planning of the church in general.

8.11 Church administration and task delegation

WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCH AND DELEGATION OF TASKS?

The pastor explained that presently the pastor is doing the pastoral ministry and the elders take care of the budget and the church accounts. The follow-up contact and cell ministry is being decentralised by the cell leaders. Most of the church ministries have lay leaders who take responsibility in running the ministry under the supervision of the pastor. Elders also do some pastoral ministry such as visiting the sick or doing home visits and taking turns to preach. The new youth pastor helps the pastor to work most effectively among the young of the church. He believes that the administration of the church needs to be decentralised so that the pastor himself does not get caught up in the daily running of the church.

He feels that it is important that he does the work God has called him to do. He emphasised the need to have prayer back-up at all times because he needs to hear clearly from God for the general direction of the church or even the direction of a sermon for a Sunday. It is important that God's work is done in God's way and in God's timing. The pastor believes that if a person gets caught up in the daily demands of life, he can miss out on many Godly opportunities that may have come across their path during the day. This is especially so when pastoring a church. The pastor needs to be free to follow God and take his congregation with him, in a Godly direction. He feels that this is the calling of the shepherd, to walk ahead and call the sheep, not to be driving from behind. As the shepherd walks ahead of the sheep,

he/she needs to be hearing the Shepherd's voice clearing and His plan for the church.

The majority of congregants of the NLCC have a definite function within the church shows that most activities have been decentralised. People are flowing within the gifting God has given them, and so they too feel fulfilled in their purpose in NLCC. These tasks, the pastor believes, encourages the believers to know that they are of value in the kingdom of God, and it spurs them on to do bigger and greater things to God's glory.

8.12 Mission and finances

HAS THE NLCC MADE A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO BE AN OUTREACH CHURCH AND ARE FINANCES SPECIFICALLY SET ASIDE FOR MISSION?

This present year's focus is outreach and they are setting funds for local outreach and for overseas mission. The church tithes their general funds into mission. All full time students who go on mission have their trips subsidised by the church.

NLCC has made a conscious decision to be an outreach church. Pastor explained that a healthy church needs to look beyond itself or it will begin to stagnate. It is vital for the church to reach out to other churches within Perth and in Australia in general and beyond into the world. Where there is a need, the NLCC will consider extending a helping hand to further the kingdom of God. It seems that God gives many opportunities to serve others. In the process the NLCC has seen that they can never 'out-give God.' The church finds that the more they are purposefully involved in

outreach, the more God gives them greater compassion for those who do not know Him yet.

The pastor found that the more the outreach of individuals within the church, the more they learn about God's protection on their lives as well as His power. A comment made by one of the congregation about outreach was, "It's time to step out in faith to fulfil God's destiny for us and others." Pastor explained that it is vital to reach out, as lack of outreach and obedience to Christ's command to complete the Great Commission, could destroy the destiny of ourselves and others. He spoke about realising the great calling on the lives of Christians.

The pastor mentioned that regular groups meet for intercessory prayer in which prayers are offered specifically for God's wisdom for the outreach in Perth. He explained that Godly wisdom is needed before rushing into situations. As we give over the situation to God, He gives the wisdom on the mode of approach to be taken so that the outreach is successful. The NLCC has found that sometimes the most effective group for outreach in Perth specifically, has been through the young people's groups such as Overdrive, Joshua Life and Twelve Stones.

8.13 Mission funds

HOW ARE MISSIONS FUNDED?

The pastor replied that missions' faith promises, designated offerings and the tithe from the church general funds are used to fund missions. There are also a number of people in the church who provide help to others who are willing to go on mission but

are unable to afford to do so financially. Most people going on mission do so with the understanding that they pay their own flights and accommodation.

8.14 Regulation of church activity

HOW DO YOU REGULATE THE DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CHURCH - such as: the youth groups, different missions going out, the eldership, the worship team and Sunday School etc? Do you have some input?

The pastor replied that there is a central church calendar and the different groups plan around this. Elders meetings are also used for planning, feedback and review of the general business of the church. The pastor receives a copy of the minutes of any ministry meetings. The pastor explained that the youth aspect of the church is the future of the church. He feels that it is important to continue to grow in this area. Therefore it was deemed necessary to appoint a lay youth pastor to help out in this area.

The pastor feels that most ministries are well run by the individuals who are the leaders of particular groups. He believes that it gives them the opportunity to develop as leaders. However, he is able to give input into whichever ministry he feels necessary. He explained that the church is like a big family, and that no particular person or group of persons should be left out of the general life of the church. As a body of Christ, every member is valuable and should fulfil their God-given duty at every opportunity so that they can grow in God and develop to their highest potential in Him.

Pastor Yat Wan explained that the church calendar had definite dates for mission trips so that the congregants could pray about mission and make themselves available on those dates. In other words, future missionaries are able to plan well ahead for their mission trip by organising work schedules during the year. During these mission trips the church will invariably not have other labour-intensive activities planned. In the absence of the pastor during mission trips, the church will always have mature Christian leadership. Pastor feels that this is the wisdom in decentralised leadership in the church. All the church activities can go on regardless of the particular mission taking place at the time. Pastor believes that the greater the social interaction among the church body, the greater community and sense of belonging. The social direction of the church makes discipleship of its members easier.

8.15 Cell group leadership

HOW ARE LEADERS OF CELL GROUPS EQUIPPED AND APPOINTED?

Pastor replied that usually leaders rise up within the group as the group matures. All leaders need to attend Christian training in the 9-10 am time slot before church service on Sundays. They are equipped by attending leaders' cell meetings and also get training from the pastor and through booklets and guides given to the leaders. All leaders are also encouraged to attend Bible School if they feel called to do so.

The pastor stressed that most leaders of groups attended the intercessory prayer time slot before the main service. This gave the group additional opportunity to pray for groups that need additional prayer or help. There is also a separate intercessory

group that meets weekly in a private home for this purpose too. Pastor believes that nobody should feel alone or out of their depth in the leadership position they find themselves in. The idea is that everybody realises that all ministries are working together to build up the body of Christ and ultimately, the Kingdom of God. Every leader is undergirded in support and prayer from the greater church community.

8.16 *Content of cell group meetings*

HOW MUCH SAY/CONTROL DO YOU HAVE IN THE CONTENT OF THE CELL MEETINGS IN THE DIFFERENT HOMES?

The pastor said that leaders make the needs of the group known to the pastor. Certain programmes can be put in place and books recommended as the need arises. More in depth study may be needed by the leader and will be supplied by the church. Different age groups within the cell do have different needs and so programs are set up accordingly. Sometimes a group may enjoy more in-depth study because they are more mature Christians. Some of the cell groups are doing the '*Master Life*' course.³⁵⁹

The pastor explained that an advanced email and text message facility helped spread church news. He is contactable at all times should any of the groups need his input.

8.17 *Balancing founder members and the youthful majority*

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN THE FOUNDER MEMBERS AND THE YOUTH WHO APPEAR TO BE IN THE MAJORITY IN THE CHURCH?

³⁵⁹ Master Life booklets are used by many of the cell groups of the NLCC. Some cells have chosen to do this series to give them a better understanding of the Bible.

Founder members get on well with the youth and there is mutual respect between the youth and the older members. The older members see the youth as the future of the church and enjoy nurturing and discipling them. The founder members encourage the youth to have meetings and even to take services and to provide outreach to the Perth community.

The Joshua Life youth group provides the backbone/support to the overseas students with the founder members providing the family balance.

Recently a youth pastor has been appointed to help in the youth department. He still engages in work outside of the church. He is considered part of the eldership of the church and works closely with the pastor.

The way that the different age-group ministries are run, there are always adults who the youth can turn to, hence, a closeness in the church between all the age groups. The 'Overdrive' teams are made up of high school students. They are supervised at all times by adults. Adults are also needed in the general transportation to and from events. At this level the youth have learnt to have mutual respect for the older members of the congregation. By the time they get to university level, they have respect for those who have prayed for them, nurtured them and walked them through difficult times. The Bible teaches that when we train a child in the way he should walk, he does not easily depart from these ways.³⁶⁰

The youth have been taught to have respect for their parents and those older than themselves within the church. The pastor feels that this mutual respect is evident in

³⁶⁰ Proverbs 22:6 "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from these ways."

the NLCC. Pastor feels that the age-gap so to speak, has never been an issue because all aspects of church life have been approached in a Biblical way.

8.18 *Pulpit sharing*

YOU SHARE YOUR PULPIT EASILY – IS THIS PERSONAL CHOICE OR WERE YOU TAUGHT TO ADD VARIETY IN BIBLE SCHOOL?

The pastor feels that he is led by God to share his pulpit with whomever God appoints. He realises that he needs to rely on great personal discernment and values the discernment of the eldership. He feels that all people need to share an anointed voice and therefore he has no right to stop the blessing flowing to the congregation from another mouthpiece. Elders are encouraged to preach and given opportunity so as to provide continuity should the pastor be away on mission or annual leave.

Guest speakers are encouraged who are permanent missionaries in Asia. Most recently a missionary from Cambodia brought some insight into the battle missionaries face daily. This obviously puts a face on those the church prays for. Use is often made of musicians and skits are used to act out messages. The youth have spontaneously formed a drama group. Skits and dramas add depth to a message and prove to be excellent illustrations for sermons.

8.19 *Understanding God*

EXPLAIN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER WITHIN THE CHURCH.

The pastor explained that God is absolute and has dominion over all. He is sovereign, Almighty and the only True God. Asians have often had experience of the

spirit world through Buddhism and ancestral worship and therefore their concept of God is all encompassing when they are converted.

The following statement by the pastor explains the Asian understanding of God:

“God is to be worshipped at all times, every day. God is part of life completely, not categorized into a Sunday slot. The Holy Spirit dwells in Christians and therefore we are a mobile church – able to impact the life of others, wherever we go.” The pastor went on to explain that we need to see Christians as having a great Godly potential and to encourage them to seek their role within their church, cell group or family.

Prayer is an important part of the Asian’s life. When they have not yet converted to Christianity they worship many gods. After conversion the Asian finds it a natural progression to pray to God Almighty, the Sovereign Lord.

However, the pastor emphasised that we should never underestimate the function of prayer. Prayer is a vital, daily activity. No function within the church can begin without opening in prayer or intercessory prayer beforehand. The function/group would not exist in the church without heartfelt prayer to ignite it in the first place. All groups are encouraged to fast and pray at different times according to their needs. Retreats often have time of fasting and prayer. No church decision is made without prayer and fasting. Intercessors are encouraged to pray before and even after church services and other intercessors meeting during the week for a time of prayer. The whole church is encouraged to pray for the church, one another and the leadership. Pastor explained that no activity, however big or small is undertaken

without prayer. Prayer is vital to hear God's plan for the church at any one given time. He explained that when we walk outside of the will of God, the church becomes less fruitful in its impact on church members and the community they wish to reach.

8.20 Sermons and their role in outreach

DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR SERMONS PLAY A MOTIVATING ROLE TO GET PEOPLE GOING ON MISSION/OUTREACH?

The pastor explained that sermons are vital to realise that we have all been called to participate in the Great Commission. They also teach people the basics and to know their Bible and to analyse God's Word for their lives. In sermons we see Jesus reaching out to those around Him. He set a pattern- although not a blue print for the church. Jesus had a heart for the lost; we need to follow this example. Cell group activities demonstrate outreach as a principle and therefore as a way of life for mankind.

Pastor Yat Wan explained that sermons might be used effectively as a tool to highlight areas of need in the world. This need may be spiritual or physical. Sermons illustrate who we are in Christ – in other words, they identify who we are as Christians. Through sermons the people soon learn that God expects us to believe the whole Bible – this includes the order to go out and make disciples. Sermons equip people for life but they also invite people to expand their lives to include those who do not know Jesus. Sermons are not feel-good messages; sermons are the sword of the Spirit that the pastor uses to challenge believers to live their faith on a

practical level. Sermons ignite the believers to a higher calling in God- to fulfil their destiny and then to have the confidence in God, to go out and make disciples of all nations.

The pastor makes use of Power Point in his sermons in order to facilitate the understanding of his sermons. Some members of the congregation speak different dialects and find the Power Point presentation helpful. The Power Point presentation encourages note-taking in the church and encourages additional Bible study. All his sermons are Bible-based and encourage further indulgence in the Word.

8.21 Gifts and ministries of church members

DO YOU PERCEIVE MEMBERS AS HAVING GIFTS AND A MINISTRY AND HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO USE THESE GIFTS?

The pastor explained that usually the gifting/ministry of members begins to show as they themselves become involved in cell groups or in other group activities. People gravitate toward the area in which they will be used. For example, a musical person will show a natural interest in the music group. Those with a heart for new people will avail themselves in hospitality. People who have time spare in the week may provide hospital visitation.

Sometimes God takes people out of their comfort zones and uses them in areas they never considered previously. People need to be encouraged to be obedient to God in those challenging times. The pastor explained that people are encouraged to use their gifts within the church. By encouragement, the pastor meant that people are

nurtured and disciplined to understand the gifts better and also their use within the church to build up the body of Christ. The basic Christian teaching classes that take place before sermons, teaches about the gifts of the spirit and their use. These foundations of faith are taught regularly before church services.³⁶¹ The Life Track program previously mentioned teaches people who they are in Christ, but also what their calling is in Christ. Once the members know that Jesus has a calling on their lives, they are more effective in other ministries as they leave their comfort zones.

8.22 Church covering

WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY “CHURCH ‘COVERING”?

My motivation for asking the pastor this question was because in an earlier chapter we had seen that many churches feel the need to join a specific church group or ministry in order to be so-called legitimately seen as a church. I refer the reader back to the section on the comment made about churches feeling the need to be under for example, Joyce Meyer Ministries or Benny Hinn Ministries. The churches I am referring to were all in the Western church group. I had not detected a similar phenomenon in the Chinese church section studied earlier. I therefore felt that it is necessary to see how the Asian pastor of the NLCC saw church covering. The pastor replied that church covering is that which is given by Jesus to His body through the Blood of the Lamb shed for the saints. This includes the following:

³⁶¹ Christian Education classes run before services on a Sunday. They may include topics such as: Christians must be able to discuss the importance of the local church in God’s overall plan. Recognise that the church must be committed to making disciples. The Christian must be willing to make adjustments to priorities to fulfil responsibilities in the Great Commission. Members are taught to recognise and plan to fulfil the role laity play in the local church. They must be able to state God’s purpose for the local church and make personal applications to their life as a member of the Body of Christ. They must be convinced and thus desire to be identified with a local body of believers by becoming a registered church member.

- i) -The intercession of the saints is a covering to the whole church including mission outreach, not just the local church.
- ii) -Other churches are seen as 'sister' churches rather than satellites or offspring churches. Sister churches are able to stand together in prayer and outreach and to share resources to further the Kingdom of God. In other words, sister churches cover one another in prayer and function. Sharing of resources is encouraged between churches.
- iii) -The constitution should 'cover' most questions. The constitution of the church should, from a legal point of view, cover the church where governing authorities may make inquiries.
- iv) -The church does not answer to a higher authority on earth, but all members are accountable to one another and to Christ. The fact that the church members are accountable to one another has proved most successful where the youth are concerned. NLCC has upheld high moral values in spite of Australia not being well known for its moral values. The fact that the youth are accountable to one another and the elders has helped to nurture a group of young people who uphold God's standards.
- v) -Church is based on the Biblical method of meeting in homes and encouragement of the saints to support one another and to reach out to the lost, in Perth as well as the rest of the world.
- vi) -To support others by encouragement and financial aid and to share in resources that God has blessed the NLCC with over the years.

vii) -Covering can also be seen, according to Pastor Yat Wan as the spiritual back up (such as prayer and teaching) and the edification of one another. By edification of one another is meant that people are encouraged in their walk in faith and built up on their journey. They learn that they are never alone, that the brothers and sisters of NLCC are there to support them and pray for them.

viii) -Networking of new areas is encouraged and people are challenged to go on mission and become involved and so complete the Great commission.

ix) -Jesus left us with the order to complete the Great Commission – pastor’s argument is that surely we have His blessing and covering to complete this task.

8.23 Summary

The role of the Asian NLCC pastor in the first world setting of Perth can be seen as follows:

i) The best of Western and Asian

The pastor is able to understand both the Western and Asian side of society. He and his wife were previously English teachers; this fact gives him an excellent command of English. The pastor was at his previous church in Singapore for 23 years, an indication that he enjoys building a solid foundation and encourages others to participate in the building process. He is goal directed in his efforts to build a wall-less church because he spends time with God everyday for the direction of the congregation. He is a man of prayer and indicated that he encourages everybody in the church to pray for God’s direction for the congregation and for the growth of every individual in the church.

The pastor can explain the Gospel well to first-time hearers based on his experience as a first-generation Christian. He is able to identify with where people are at in their faith walk and blends in well with the Western setting. He is aware of the challenges facing new Christians in their work-place where criticism may be harsh. This is the reason the church encourages fast maturation of individual Christians with a variety of opportunities to truly know God's Word. Pastor encourages discipleship at all times for this reason. I believe that the teaching background of the pastor has dictated his desire to teach all Christians, whether they are first-generation Christians or new members to the church. The broad spectrum of learning opportunities is proof of this. We need only think of the Life Track program as well as discipleship classes and the general cell group meetings that all have teaching opportunities. The different youth groups are also on a learning journey with many different opportunities for study and outreach. I believe that this capacity to teach and nurture is instrumental in giving all Christians under the pastor's care the confidence to reach out as Christians. I saw a pattern here of encouraging people in their faith walk and nurturing them within the community group. In the process they are encouraged to participate in the vision of the church. In this way they meet a need within the church or on the mission field. This process gives the impression of a true, living faith. This is one other reason for the NLCC appearing to be wall-less.

Members are encouraged to be involved in the church by being made aware of the vision of the church, the need of the church and then they are trained and equipped for ministry within this context. I believe that this matures the Christian quicker because they believe they can be of use to God. They grow in confidence and then

the next step awaits them in that members are encouraged to take up leadership roles. I found this to be unusual because it is not common place in a Western setting. The encouragement to take responsibility and lead has encouraged many more people in their Christian walk. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are used extensively to glorify God. Here I saw the pastor in his role as a facilitator and not just the teacher of a group of congregants. All people are seen as having Godly potential.

Pastor is reachable at all times even although he does not have a secretary and makes excellent use of text messages on the mobile phone and emails. I have found this to be the most astounding fact of the church. A pastor who is totally reachable at all times, because he sees his life as devoted to God and fully available to whatever God has planned for his day. He instils a passion for service and worship by example.

ii) Calling to the city of Perth and Asia

He is able to identify with others who are from a completely rural setting because of the missionary calling therefore he is never unprepared for the demands and rigors of mission. Westerners are welcomed into the church and encouraged to participate in whichever way God leads them. He encourages outreach overseas as well as into the city of Perth. He loves to see needs met as the Gospel is brought to others.

Throughout my observation of the NLCC I saw the servant heart of the congregation.

Pastor's indication that he understands church should be as depicted in the book of Acts. This explains his social personality as he encourages the sharing of meals from house to house as indicated in the New Testament church. The social direction of the

church makes discipleship of its members easier. I saw true community in the different groups that meet. All the meetings were an honour to God and seen as worship of His holy name.

I do believe that the pastor, as a first-generation Christian, is more aware of the needs of new Christians in a post-Christian setting. The pastor does not appear to want to build up the church in just encouraging huge numbers to attend church on a Sunday, but sees church growth as the growth of the individual Christian. As the Christian matures they can then reach out to others and so complete the Great Commission. Another interesting outcome of the interview is that the pastor did not see any difference in ministering to a first-generation Christian or somebody who knows the Gospel. I believe that mature Christians who join the church feel free to attend Christian education classes only to find that they do not know as much as they thought they did.

There is a definite Kingdom of God awareness rather than merely a church awareness. The church is not seen as a place to contain all their blessings among themselves, but it appears to be a channel used to receive blessings and resources and is then used to share and bless others in turn. The church is a dynamic, living organism continually reaching out to others in Perth and Asia. The Gospel is spread joyfully not as a means to an end, but rather as a joyful commitment to God Himself. Every outreach is considered to be an honour to the Master Himself.

MacArthur in *The Master's Plan for the Church* suggests the church's muscles are preaching, teaching, evangelism and missions, worship, prayer, discipleship,

shepherding and building up families through fellowship.³⁶² MacArthur's identification confirms what the NLCC pastor has raised in this chapter as the important functions of a growing church. The NLCC unity in serving is demonstrated in Tenney's *God's Dream Team* comments that the church should be a 'releaser instead of a restricter' then unity is enhanced because it is related to servant-hood.³⁶³ Gilley believes the local church must equip the saints for service. He says the instrument for equipping is the Word of God.³⁶⁴ Gilley's, *This Little Church went to Market* mentions the early church spent most of its time evangelising. His findings suggest equipping and evangelising as important activities of the church.³⁶⁵ These are the activities avidly pointed out by the NLCC pastor in order to draw all members into fellowship, activity and growth.

Pritchard, cited in Gilley, commented that the goal of Christian life is not fulfilment but faithfulness.³⁶⁶ His suggestion is that modern churches cater for the needs of the believer by moulding the Gospel into an attractive package thereby denying repentance and the worship God deserves. Pritchard's description of modern church is in contrast to the NLCC and Asian church desire to worship God through service in all things as suggested by Yun in *Living Waters*. He suggests the West has intellectualised the Gospel and left out faith and trust in Jesus. He says that Christians will only know the Scriptures if they are willing to be changed by them. This is in direct contrast to the aforementioned comment that the Gospel is moulded to suit the needs of the church in the West.

³⁶² John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (US: Chicago, Moody Press, 1991), 57-70

³⁶³ Tommy Tenney, *God's Dream Team* (California: Ventura, Regal, 1999), 67-69

³⁶⁴ Gary E Gilley, *This Little Church Stayed at Home* (NY: Webster, Evangelical Press, 2006), 57

³⁶⁵ Gary E Gilley, *This Little Church went to Market* (NY: Webster, Evangelical Press, 2005), 11

³⁶⁶ G A Pritchard, *Ibid*, 73

Yun mentions discipline, prayer and submission as hallmarks of the Asian church. He believes God's Word is missing in the Western church.³⁶⁷ Yun's comments demonstrate that NLCC has the same identifiable characteristics as an Asian church in Asia. I believe this is the reason that the church appears wall-less with a large group of active Christians. NLCC Christians are mostly first-generation Christians, they have had no other way of church except such as has been demonstrated in Asia with mostly first-generation Christians who all serve God in whatever capacity and see this activity as worship of God. The first-generation Christian Asian pastor plays a vital role in the understanding of the function of church with God as central in all church activity. This finding is confirmed by Moffet in *Evangelism: the Leading Partner*, where he says that evangelism must never be so narrow as to try to build the kingdom without the King.³⁶⁸

In NLCC the focus of all church activity is to worship God and give Him the glory He deserves, not merely to build a church. Snyder suggests that the church is a worshipping and serving community of God's people.³⁶⁹ Snyder's article, *Liberating the Church*, is in keeping with the outcome of the interview with the pastor because we realise that the NLCC strives as a community to worship God and serve others. The interpretation of the pastor's interview demonstrates that growing a wall-less church starts by building strong believers who labour together to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

³⁶⁷ Brother Yun, *Living Waters*, Paul Hattaway, ed. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 59,179,207,

³⁶⁸ Samuel H Moffet, "Evangelism: The Leading Partner", *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, eds. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 576

³⁶⁹ Howard A Snyder, *Liberating the Church*, (Illinois: Downers Grove, Inter-varsity Press, 1983), 17

CHAPTER 9

WORSHIP - AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE ACCORDING TO THE NLCC

Can it be said that the Asian Christian worships or experiences worship of Almighty God in a different manner or capacity to that of the Western Christian?

With this question in mind, I spoke to diverse members (see further information on this group below) of the NLCC to compare their perspective on worship. I realised that their perception of understanding worship was broader than the general Western concept of understanding worship.

One would expect the concept of worship to be similar to that of the average Western Christian. The different understanding of worship led to an opinion-bouncing group of ten Western Christians being inter-viewed to find out what they understood by worship. (Find more information on the Western group below). The ten Western Christians were questioned as to their understanding or feeling of worship. The opinion-bouncing group is made up of co-called traditional and Pentecostal Christians. This more diverse group of Western Christians will give us a broader view on worship of God from a Western perspective.

9.1 The groups surveyed

Ten members of the NLCC were asked about their understanding of worship. I planned to interview members of the church who had not previously been interviewed in the other groups, such as Founder Members, First-generation

Christians, Returned Missionary group or any-one in the Youth Groups or in the worship team itself.

I wanted a diverse group from youth to more elderly members and included both male and female members. The group comprised five female and five male members of the church ranging in age groups from the early twenties to mid-fifties. The particular group I chose to interview were members of NLCC that I knew well enough to ask their feelings on worship. They are church members who attend regularly and have been open about their faith and the way they experience church. However, they did not mind talking about worship in the initial approach and adding more comments at a later stage. I initially spoke to the interviewees individually in December 2007 and January 2008. The general discussion with the group took place in February 2008.

I interviewed the ten NLCC individual members before or after the Sunday service, depending on their availability. The NLCC interviewee responses were so surprising and interesting that I met up with all interviewees again at a later stage to discuss their responses at a deeper level. One of the group members, a middle-aged male also responded further via email to explain his interpretation of worship. Their responses are provided later in this chapter.

THE WESTERN OPINION-BOUNCING GROUP

The Western Christian group interviewed is made up of ten Christians who I personally know as believing and serving members of other churches. I decided on this method because I needed practising Christians who would most likely be able to

give me their interpretation on worship, rather than the random group I had interviewed previously regarding the Great Commission. The concept of worship is not easy to discuss casually, hence the need to know my interviewees well enough and their relationship with God.

The main features of the Western group are presented here:

- The age-range of the interviewees covered from 18 years of age to two interviewees in their 70's. The churches they serve in are as follows:
- The two 70 year olds (husband and wife) are from the Catholic Church and have been loyal members of this church all their lives. They attend mass every Sunday and also several times during the week.
- Three of the remaining men are in the 40-50 year age group. One is a member of the Methodist Church, another from the Uniting Church and the third man from the Baptist Church. The fifth gentleman is in his thirties and also attends a Baptist Church. This particular Baptist church is considered more charismatic than the church attended by the previously mentioned Baptist member.
- The remaining four ladies interviewed are in the 18 to mid-40 year age group. One lady is in her 40's and goes to the Four Square Church. It is considered conservative in Bible teaching but with a charismatic outlook in that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are encouraged in the church services. Another lady in her thirties is also from the more charismatic Baptist Church. One of the younger woman interviewed is 20 years of age and from the more conservative Baptist Church group. The 18 year-old is from

the Lutheran Church. This particular Lutheran Church is charismatic and the 18 year-old heads the music team.

- I interviewed all these Western Christians individually about their understanding of worship by making appointments to discuss the question of worship with them. Interviews, on average, lasted between 15 and 20 minutes.

I will discuss the results of the Western Christian interviewees first.

9.2 The following is the result of the Western Christians responses to the concept of worship

Worship is or can be defined or experienced as:

- i) - Singing hymns or spiritual songs to God in church.
- ii)-Listening to Christian music and meditating on God.
- iii) - Praising God with words of awe.
- iv)-Speaking and singing to God during times of devotion.
- v)-Reading devotions morning and evening and seeking God's face.
- vi)-Dancing in prophetic dance groups in order to honour God.
- vii)-Worship is to sacrifice our self to God when we give our life to Christ and we walk in His ways.
- viii)-Worship can happen anywhere, it is when we acknowledge God in the midst of daily life.

ix)-When we worship, we acknowledge God's greatness through prayer, songs, teaching, dancing and studying His Word.

x)-Worship is to acknowledge God's sovereignty.

During the questioning of the Western Christian group, all Christians responded by first mentioning singing songs to God as what came to mind first when thinking about worship. The rest of the above comments made by the group were additional to first mentioning hymn-singing as worship. The additional statements were made after some prompting when I encouraged them to think 'more broadly'. These statements can be put into different categories such as music and dance, devotions and prayer and acknowledging God as Sovereign.

9.3 The NLCC's response to the question of worship

The response of the NLCC was different. They all acknowledge that they first thought of music and singing as worship (as discussed in an earlier chapter), but they also felt the following to be worship of God. The following ten responses from the NLCC will show the different interpretations of worship.

i) - "Worship is a brotherhood of believers honouring God, as the most high: there is no other."

ii) - "Worship is to be of service to God – wherever He needs us, so that we can bring honour to His name. We must give of ourselves to glorify God. The giving can also be our time, finances or abilities, without holding back anything from God, because it all belongs to Him"

iii) - "To worship means to humble ourselves to see that we need Jesus, we need the cross and we are nothing without Him."

iv)-"Worship is to love others with God's love."

v)-"Worship means the freedom in God to obey Him, whatever the cost or order.

This even includes giving our life to God as a martyr for the faith. This would be the ultimate way to glorify God in worship."

vi)-"Worship means to celebrate God's grace, mercy and love to a lost world and to bring that message to the lost and searching world. This way of worship will be outside of the four walls of the church and take place in our daily lives."

vii)-"Worship means to use our spiritual gifts to glorify God and bring His name to all the earth."

viii)-"To worship God is to know Him as the Great I Am in our lives."

ix)-"Worship is to nurture new Christians and to bring the Gospel message throughout all the earth. We worship God when we evangelise and bring others to a saving knowledge of Him."

x)-"To worship is to point to Jesus and the Cross. We must marvel in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and nothing else. We must please God and not man. We truly worship God when we please Him and enlarge His Kingdom. We still only do it by His grace. We can only fear God, and nothing else or we demonstrate lack of confidence in an Almighty, Sovereign King."

From the above statements by the NLCC Christians, certain themes appear to run in the responses. The themes include – humility, servant-hood, being an overcomer, discipleship, evangelism and most importantly the fear of God and reverence for His holy Name in obedience to His Word. These themes that I identified after my individual interviews with the NLCC Christians were discussed in greater detail at a combined cell group dinner.

The Western Christians' understanding of worship of God does not normally associate the themes detected in the NLCC responses. In the light of the responses to the questions, a deeper discussion and study path was taken in their understanding of worship.

9.4 Themes discovered in the NLCC's understanding of worship

9.4.1 Humility and worship of God

It became evident in the interviews that the NLCC members feel that humility plays a vital role in where they stand in worship. They feel that worship is about God, for God and to glorify Him. They believe that true worship cannot take place unless the Christian is prepared to become less visible. The NLCC members who were questioned gave the following verse as an ideal verse suggesting the humility of the Christian.

John 3:27-30 "John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he

hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. HE MUST BECOME GREATER; I MUST BECOME LESS." ³⁷⁰ (My emphasis).

This discussion on humility as vital in worship further suggested that when Christians decrease or become less, then God could increase in importance within the body of Christ. By decrease the interviewees believe that the worshipper becomes more aware of God as Almighty and therefore must bow to God's will in complete submission. To worship God is understood to be the reverence of His Name, and we as Christians need to bow in awe of His greatness. This is also understood to bring mankind to the point when we realise that we can do nothing without God, that we have no life or future without God and that when we enthrone God, all glory goes to God and not to the church or a particular leader within the church.

A further suggestion made by the respondents is that we need to die to ourselves or come to the end of ourselves in order to realise the grandeur of God and that He is truly worthy of our worship. In order to accept any position in the church, we must also suffer with Him. There is no need for mankind to be anything but humble before the Almighty.

Positions of ministry within the NLCC are accepted with great humility after much prayer and seeking God to know His desire for the life of the individual. A position in ministry is not taken lightly because all glory must go to God. Unless a Christian is mature enough in the faith and has died to the self – the ministry position would not bring glory to God but rather attention to the individual. This situation would not bring the glory to Christ and so further the Great Commission as speedily and

³⁷⁰ *New International Version*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992)

effectively as Christ intended. This thought raised during the discussion was acknowledged as of great importance in glorifying God, by keeping Christians in a position of being teachable and approachable and keeping the glory focus on God alone. Serving God in any capacity is to worship Him.

The respondents brought the subject of the cross to mind as the connection between humility and worship of God. Christ had to bear the indignity of the cross to save us, why must we glory in it. Only Christ can be glorified in it, and we need to give the glory.

In the discussion with each interviewee they mentioned the following Bible verse as vital in their understanding of worshipping God.

Numbers 12:7-8 “But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak FACE TO FACE...” (My emphasis.)³⁷¹

They said that it has to be a matter of the heart when we worship God. God uses those who are prepared to do His will and complete HIS program and not our own programs. They also emphasised the same in Acts 13:22 “...I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart, who will do everything I want him to do.”³⁷² The important aspect here is that God decides what program should be carried out, and not man or a particular church organization.

The interviewees discussed this point further by saying that humble people glorify God and He can move heaven and earth with humble and willing servants. They said that Christians should learn to establish God’s throne, not build their own kingdom.

³⁷¹ *New International Version*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

³⁷² *Ibid*

The church is a living organism to the glory of God and not an organization of man. When the organization becomes more important or is perceived to be greater than the One it serves, it is failing in its worship of God. The NLCC concluded that humility and obedience to God are linked and one cannot stand without the other. However, together they form an excellent foundation in the worship of God. In other words, God accepts the worship and praise of the humble and obedient person.

9.4.2 Servant-hood and worship

The interviewees suggested that Jesus is a prime example of a servant. He came to earth as a man to serve and while doing so, to give glory to the Father. All Christians are called to follow Christ as the ultimate example. One NLCC respondent referred to Christ being the 'first born of many brethren'. It follows that we should continue His example because He came to show us the way.

Christ welcomed children even at a time when the disciples felt it was not the place for them. NLCC welcomes children into the main service so that the children may hear the Gospel and worship before dispersing to Sunday school where activities are provided for them according to age group.

Christ spent much time in prayer so He is our example that prayer is worship of the Father. The concept of prayer was mentioned by the NLCC as one of the most important ways to worship God. Prayer brings us closer to God. They felt that in prayer they give glory to His Name. They mentioned that they enter the throne room through praise and worship. This entry into the throne room need not only be in corporate worship, but is vital in time of prayer; be it corporate or individual

prayer in the prayer closet. They mentioned the prayer of Jesus as seen in John 17 as one of the most moving passages of the Bible. They felt that Jesus left us with an example of absolute humility to the Father – but also one of obedience to do the whole will of God. In doing the whole will of God, they felt they are then worshipping God.

Intercessory prayer was mentioned in particular as a form of worship. They felt that in intercession they are bringing the needs of others into the throne room of God. As Jesus prayed for His disciples before the crucifixion, they feel that they are called to pray for one another because Jesus is our perfect example.

It was also mentioned that no revival started without prayer, so prayer is a vitally important manner of worshipping God. They believe that in prayer they bare their souls and are open to their Maker. In so doing they open themselves to hear Him and His plan for their lives. The respondents believe that prayer brings them to servant-hood because they hear the Father’s directions for their lives. This picture of servant-hood, ties in with the concept; “brotherhood of believers”, mentioned by the first NLCC respondent. In other words, all believers are brothers and therefore servants of God.

Further, they believe that when they are obedient to the directions of God – they serve Him and so worship Him. Service brings honour to God’s Holy Name.

Many examples of serving God and so worshipping Him were given. Examples mentioned included visiting the sick, clothing the poor, inviting the lonely to a meal, cell group or church, giving dignity to the elderly and doing outreach and mission

both near home and overseas. Of note is the fact that many saw servant-hood as a practice run for handling the end time harvest.

We can conclude that servant-hood springs from humility and brings the Christian to the point where they need to be an overcomer. Total dependence on God is for them the key to servant-hood.

9.4.3 Being an “overcomer”

The interviewees said that an overcomer could be defined as a person who has realised that he needs to die to the flesh and live to glorify Christ. This is not a single act with instant results, but it is rather a process that all Christians should strive to go through after the initial act of salvation or making a commitment to serve Christ. By the term ‘die to the flesh’ the interviewees mean that we have to set aside our own agendas and desires and strive to be committed to Christ’s will for our lives. This means that we no longer live lives focussed on ourselves and our plans, but on how God wants to use us to further His Kingdom on earth.

They mentioned that the process of becoming an overcomer differs in all individuals because it depends on what the new Christian needs to ‘overcome’ in their life in order to be released fully to serve Christ.

Those questioned in the NLCC mentioned several ungodly habits people may struggle with, that need to be set aside or over-come in order to walk in victory.

These habits or ungodly ways in life included – abuse of alcohol or drugs, living with somebody of the same or opposite sex in a sexual relationship before marriage, love of money and being determined to be richer and smarter than anyone else. The

other vices such as swearing, cheating, lying or overspending were also mentioned. These habits seem obvious to the Christian until they mentioned that we need to overcome spending too much time on ourselves and come to the realization that time is a gift from God and needs to be used to glorify Him. They felt that true overcomers spend time in the presence of God so that they may hear Him and so know God's desire for their lives. In this way their lives are Holy Spirit led and not led by the wiles of this world.

This they felt means that it is no longer ourselves who live, but Christ who lives in and through the individual. They felt that the Apostle Paul was referring to becoming an overcomer when he mentioned the race that we run and we need to press forward in our walk with God. The walk with God is the high calling in Christ.

Being an overcomer ties in; they felt, with the concept of humility first mentioned in this section on worship. They felt all need to be broken before anyone can become humble so that God can use us fully for His glory. When the weakness in us is accepted, then individuals are able to accept power from God to do great things in the name of Christ, all the while glorifying the Godhead.

The interviewees felt that when we accept God's plan for our lives, we submit to Him, we become more humble to the point where our spirit is broken, but God's Spirit lives in us. They mentioned the following verse to illustrate their point: Psalm 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."³⁷³

³⁷³ *New International Version* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

The group also mentioned the incident in Luke 7 verse 36-50 where the story is related of Mary Magdalene breaking open the perfume bottle in order to wash the feet of Jesus. They felt this is symbolic of the person being broken in spirit from the old way of life in order to send forth a sweet odour to the Lord. This sweet odour in turn is attractive to the unbeliever. The NLCC respondents believed that if an individual brought Christ's love to the unbelievers, they are more likely to respond positively to the Gospel message, than a message of judgment on the unbeliever. However, they all emphasised that the sin in the life of the unbeliever must never be trivialized because God hates sin. Rather the sweet odour of a broken and contrite spirit should bring conviction into the life of the unbeliever. This is a sweet odour to the Lord.

Further in the discussion, the respondents felt that unless they as Christians experience brokenness, they cannot lead others to Christ. They need to show the love and compassion of Christ to others, but they cannot do it unless they have been broken and so in turn their wounds have been bound and healed by the love of Christ. They felt that the outcome of brokenness is humility and total reliance on God. When they totally rely on God, then they are showing their confidence in God. Confidence in Almighty God brings glory to His Name and this is also seen as worship. They mentioned that God uses those who humble themselves before Him. Humble people are more receptive to the calling of God. The interviewees gave the following verse as an illustration of cleaving close to God in humility. Psalm 34:18

“The Lord is close to the broken hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”³⁷⁴

Furthermore, they mentioned the following verse in Revelation as extremely important in the life of an overcomer. Revelation 12:11 “They overcame him by the BLOOD of the Lamb, and by the WORD of their TESTIMONY; they did NOT love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”³⁷⁵ They have the opinion that Revelation 12:11 demonstrates that overcomers mature to the stage where their own lives are no longer the focus of their attention. Their calling in Christ is the motivation for daily life because in this calling in Christ lies the ultimate worship of Christ. They feel that God is worshipped in the testimony of the saints. Revelation 12:11 also brings us to the fact that the NLCC Christian saw evangelism and mission work as worship of Christ. The group felt that when they reach out to others locally or internationally on the mission field, then this is an act of worship of God because they are being obedient to His will to reach out to others.

9.4.4 Discipleship, evangelism and mission as worship of God

The “...word of their testimony...” found in the above verse drives the NLCC Christians to see the importance of outreach and mission. They explained that the first portion of the verse mentioned the conquering of the evil one by the blood of Jesus AND the testimony of the overcomer.

Once they have made a commitment to Christ and have started to walk a Holy Spirit filled life, they felt the need to reach out to as many people as possible to bring the

³⁷⁴ *New International Version*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

³⁷⁵ *New International Version* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992)

life-giving Gospel. They all saw this as worship of God. This is most unusual from the Western point of view of our understanding of worship.

They explained that the blood of the Lamb is the first step to over-coming evil according to this verse in Revelation. However, the over-coming of evil does not stop at making a life commitment to serve Christ; it goes further to leading them to become over comers by their life and testimony. Revelation compels them to see the overcoming process as on- going. The on-going worship of God through their different testimonies of what God is doing in each person's life is a vital form of worship that brings more people to an understanding of God in their daily lives.

The NLCC felt that this testimony is ongoing worship of God in order to bring salvation to those around them who would normally not attend a church service and so doing, hear the testimony of Christ. They felt that part of worship is to bring Christ to others through their testimony of Christ in their lives. The testimony of Christ in their lives is far-reaching. In a so-called post-Christian society such as Australia, outreach by Christians' testimony of Christ in their lives is not always received favourably. It was suggested that post-Christian people do not easily enter a church, but by the testimony of the Christian's life in the workplace, souls can so easily be reached and lives changed. The aspect of lives being changed by the testimony of the believer was further discussed when it was mentioned that many come to salvation but so few are converted.

The NLCC believes that conversion will result in the Christian testifying outside of the so-called church. The testimony of the converted is evangelism. Evangelism in turn is the Great Commission being taken seriously. The Great Commission taken seriously is the worship of God. They believe each convert is a disciple and therefore a representative of Christ. A group of individuals make the body of Christ. Lack of discipleship will show because the greatest growth in the body needs to be conversion growth. Conversion growth brings glory to God and so He is worthy of their worship as lives are changed. As they glorify God in their witnessing by their testimony, they believe they are worshipping God. When these testimonies are shared in daily life, then God is continually worshipped in everyday life. A converted life needs to speak of holiness and reverence for His Holy Name.

9.4.5 Fear of God and reverence for His Holy Name

The respondents mentioned the fear of God as the most misunderstood part of worship. They stated that fear of God does not mean that they are afraid of God, but rather in awe of His greatness and holiness. The prophets of old were mentioned as those who feared God. God can do much with a man who has died to himself and lives in awe and fear and reverence of God. They all agreed that the fear of God leads to holiness. They realise that no man can stand in the presence of God. Great cleansing needs to take place in the lives of each person and from day to day they need to die to themselves in order to live holy lives in reverence of God.

Isaiah 11:1-5 was quoted as a verse that demonstrated why we should fear God.

(Emphasis mine.)

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding;
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the FEAR of the Lord –
and he will delight in the FEAR of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears,
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
RIGHTEOUSNESS will be his belt
and FAITHFULNESS the sash around his waist.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ *New International Version*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing Company, 1992).

They explained that holiness means lives fully devoted to God in which every aspect of their lives are lived to glorify God and worship Him totally. They felt that holiness stems from realising that all are sinners saved by the grace of God. Nobody is saved through his own goodness or merit but because of the righteousness of Christ and His faithfulness in dying on the cross for all people. Because Christ was faithful even unto death, surely all are called to face the fact that this is the ultimate worship of God – being completely obedient to Him. Obedience brings honour to God and this is the goal of worship, to honour God.

Christ worshipped the Father by the ultimate call of obedience. All people are called to realise that worship of God is a call to holiness, righteousness and faithfulness even to the point of giving our lives as a sacrifice in worship if called to do so.

Martyrdom is mentioned often as the ultimate call. Righteous living and faithfulness among the servants of the Lord is stressed as a key in furthering the Great Commission.

This particular understanding of worship is not found readily in the Western church. Could this be the reason the Western church has lost its passion for servant-hood and obedience?

The respondents explained worship further by the following comments.

- “Love for God brings commitment to serve and worship Him.”
- “Servant-hood and worship brings forth desire to bring others to salvation.”
- “Salvation first; and then total conversion to a new way of life in Christ – His Kingship in our lives.”

- “The new way matures us into a greater knowledge of Him.”
- “A greater knowledge springs forth into a hunger to spread the Gospel and to see the Great Commission accomplished.”
- “The Great Commission will usher in His Kingdom as we tabernacle with Him and wait for the final trumpet call.”

To tabernacle is understood to mean living in close relationship with God. As the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian, so the Christian must dwell in God. The respondents understood this to mean involving God wholly in their lives. This means that God is not seen as a small aspect of their lives as far as church attendance goes. Rather, to tabernacle with God means to seek His will and way in every aspect of their lives. In doing so, they bring glory to God in all the facets of their lives. This they understand to be living in holiness and perpetual worship of the Almighty.

9.5 Outcome of interviews

When we take into consideration the interviews of both the Western and NLCC Christians, we realise that there are differences in their understanding of worship. The following differences are some of the most noteworthy.

- We can conclude that in this particular study, the Western Christian interviewed has a narrower view of worship than the Asian Christian. From the groups interviewed we see that most Western Christians perceived worship of God to be more of a corporate exercise than the NLCC respondent.

- The Western Christian also experienced worship as something involving music or in some cases dance. A minority of the Western Christians mentioned acknowledging God's sovereignty as a form of worship within our daily lives. However, the Western Christian did mention that devotions, as in reading God's word are a form of worship. In general, the Western Christian understood worship of God to mean praising God in one form or another.
- The NLCC respondents all felt that worship involved corporate as well as the individual honouring of God through humility and obedience to God. They had a more practical perception of worship. By this practical perception I mean that they saw outreach and discipleship as the natural follow-on of a converted and devoted life. Discipleship builds up the kingdom of God and so brings honour and glory to His name. This they see as worship as well as the glorifying of God's name through music, dance and prayer.
- The NLCC believes that worship must take place outside the four walls of the church in order to bring continued glory to God's name. By taking the act of worship into everyday life, evangelism takes place in the market place. In other words, when they worship God, they further His kingdom by carrying out the Great Commission. They believe that worship does not stop when the church service is complete. It is a vitally important part of being a Christian.
- The NLCC interviewees believe that the most important form of worship is to fear God and live in righteousness and holiness and then to take His Gospel out to the waiting world and in so doing, to bring even greater glory to God as more of the earth give glory to and worships Him. They believe that the

greatest form of worship of God is to build up the Bride of Christ so that she is ready for the coming of the Bridegroom/King.

9.6 Summary

Surely confining the worship of God to within the four walls of the church does not bring as much glory to the Almighty God, as would a church moving outside of the four walls and bringing glory to God in worship every day within every situation we may find ourselves in. The NLCC interviewees questioned whether the church was ready to receive the Bridegroom by quoting the following verse from Revelation.

Revelation 22:17 says, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” Can the bride really say “come” to the Lord if she has not carried out the order of Jesus to complete the Great Commission? It seems logical that the more people who are saved, the greater the worship of God. How can people take the above-mentioned ‘free gift of the water of life?’ Where do they find it, except within the organized church? Is this then a free gift when they cannot find it except within a church? Surely free does not mean without payment only, but it means freely available. The free gift should be freely available in everyday life as the church moves into the market place and spreads the Gospel as it worships God. Therefore the brotherhood concept of the NLCC church becomes a community with unity, reaching out across the city and world.

In the light of the above outcome of the interviews, it is interesting to see that many Western Christians have started to question what the church understands by the

word, worship. The following are some of the comments made about worship in the church presently, and especially in the more post-Christian church.

James Boice commented that he believes that true worship does not exist in a considerable section of the evangelical church.³⁷⁷ Boice, known as a great preacher, believed that the absence of service elements was lacking in the church. He suggested that worship of God was not merely songs sung, but all the elements of church, including the sermon, were important in the worship of God. Here we see that Boice himself had a broader view on worship than many post-Christian churches today. It ties in well in that the NLCC believes that Word preaching is vital in moving the church out into the community as a form of worshipping God.

In a similar vein, Sennett, as cited in Boice also commented that the post-modern church has lost its confidence in the authority of the Bible because modern man does not want to stand under any authority.³⁷⁸ R. Albert Mohler mentions that in the modern church, worship becomes more of “an opportunity for entertainment mixed with the possibility of a numinous experience.”³⁷⁹ Mohler continues by saying that people move from congregation to congregation in order to find some sort of a “worship experience that will meet their perceived spiritual needs. Worship is turned into just another consumer commodity.”³⁸⁰ This comment illustrates to us that some post-Christian churches may be perceived to be self-centred in their

³⁷⁷ James M Boice. Edited by Philip G. Ryken, Derek Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan. *Give Praise to God*. (New Jersey, Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 2003), 76-77

³⁷⁸ R. Albert Mohler. Expository Preaching: Center of Christian Worship. Boice et al, *Give Praise to God*, 115

³⁷⁹ R. Albert Mohler. Expository Preaching: Center of Christian Worship. Boice et al, *Give Praise to God*, 118

³⁸⁰ R. Albert Mohler. Expository Preaching: Center of Christian Worship. Boice et al, *Give Praise to God*, 119

worship, by this is meant, that it is all about the Christian and his needs, and never about God.

The NLCC members have a different view of worship as seen above in the outcome of the interviews. God is central in worship, and it is about God's will for their lives, as they bow in submission to Him. Jones has a similar view to Mohler in his comment on the post-modern church when he mentions that the Western culture is self-centred. He believes that little attention is given to teaching about true Biblical worship. He believes that the lack of Biblical foundation in their teaching of worship has led to a more "hedonistic, narcissistic, relativistic, 'me-focussed' age."³⁸¹ Mohler furthers his argument by mentioning that success of a church is measured in numbers and modernity of technology and the effect of how good the worship makes the individual feel.

We have seen during this study that the NLCC never saw numbers as success in a church, but rather felt to move outside the church into the market-place where more people could hear the Word.

We mentioned that the Western church interviewees saw corporate worship more readily than individual worship. The NLCC saw individual worship as important too. This is where the previous comment about taking the church into the market-place hits home, so to speak. Usually individual church members are working in the market-place. They are not there as a corporate body of the church. This means that an individual of the NLCC spreading the Gospel outside the church is seen as a

³⁸¹Paul S. Jones. Hymnody in a post-hymnody world in Boice et al, *Give Praise to God*, (New Jersey, Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 2004), 223

form of worship of God. This is why the comment they made about fearing God and living righteous lives is so important. Society sees us as we really are, and therefore the NLCC believes it is important to live a righteous, God-fearing life. They see the whole way they conduct themselves on a daily basis as part of their worship of God.

In the light of the above comment, Duncan and Johnson discussed the recent trend in the church where the family unit has become important again after years of neglect. They mentioned that this has had a positive effect in the sense that the family unit has a so-called built-in, authority structure. They believe that this is where discipleship can start and where family-based groups can start to grow a church and where corporate worship takes place.³⁸² I believe that this is a refreshing change in the Western church because, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the all-important family unit is the best way to evangelise in many countries, including the Asian countries. I believe that this is the basis for the worshipful outreach of the NLCC. The NLCC comprises many family groups that live together, worship together and reach out to others together.

Basden admits that contemporary worship is defined by the music that is fashionable at the time, but he warns us to heed the words of Paul Zahl. Zahl maintains that contemporary music can change from feelings of intimacy toward God to intimate feelings that have "...nothing to do with God."³⁸³

³⁸² J. Ligon Duncan and Terry L. Johnson. "A Call to Family Worship." In Boice et al. *Give Praise to God*, (New Jersey, Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 2003), 317-321.

³⁸³ Paul A. Basden. "Conclusion." *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*. Paul E. Engle and P. Basden. Editors. (Michigan, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 254

Robert Webber adds further to this comment when he suggested that this type of worship may take us “...into the realm of works and out of the realm of grace.”³⁸⁴ I believe that the above comments of Basden, Zahl and Webber show us that the Western church does have a narrower view of worship in that the music side of worship is stressed with the loss of the broader understanding of worship.

Paul Basden suggests that we, as humans are called to worship God. However, he raises the issue that because of the fact that we are human, we all approach worship differently.³⁸⁵ This comment of Bas-den’s could be the key to understand why the Western and Asian Christians understand and experience worship differently.

Sally Morgenthaler has a passion to reach the generation that has not attended church in the post-Christian world. She raises the issue as to whether the post-modern world should adopt all the new ways of the community into the church. The conclusion she came to is that in the so-called emerging church of the post-modern era, man wants to worship God and experience something. However, she expressed the hope that the emerging church will become increasingly aware of the Who that we worship and less aware of the self who does the wor-shipping.³⁸⁶

I believe that Morgenthaler has raised an important issue here. If the post-Christian church concentrates mostly on the music side of worship, the church could become increasingly self-centred because the musicians in the church are raised to a new level at the cost of the preaching of the Word. When the church once more

³⁸⁴ Paul A. Basden. “Conclusion.” *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*. Paul E. Engle and P. Basden. Editors. (Michigan, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 254.

³⁸⁵ Paul A. Basden. “Conclusion.” *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*. Paul E. Engle and P. Basden, Editors. (Michigan, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 251.

³⁸⁶ Sally Morgenthaler. “Emerging Worship.” *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*. Paul E. Engle and Paul A. Basden, Editors. (Michigan, Grand Rapids, Zondervan 2004) ,217-230

understands that worship of God is much broader than just music ministry, space is created for worship of God through hearing His Word and allowing it to change the lives of the hearers. In this way, as we have seen in the NLCC, the hearing of the Word has broadened their view of worship to realise that worship of God includes obedience to His Word and allowing this Word to permeate through their lives in holiness and righteousness as they reach out to others as an act of worship of God.

The conclusion we can come to from the interview results in this particular study is that the post-Christian church in general sees worship in a narrower sense than the NLCC. The broader view of worship of the NLCC members includes studying God's Word as a form of worship, living righteous and holy lives and making themselves available for God to use them in discipleship and outreach. These all form part of worship. This much broader view of worship results in a church where worship is not confined to an activity within the church, but it spills out of the church into the community and in doing so, contributes to the view that NLCC is a wall-less church.

CHAPTER 10

BECOMING A WALL-LESS CHURCH IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE GREAT COMMISSION

This chapter integrates and summarizes the reasons I, as the participant observer, perceived the NLCC to be a wall-less, growing church in a post-Christian area.

I am aware that generalisations cannot be made about churches. However, our investigation in chapter one suggests that the Western church is not growing in numbers or maturity in Spirit of individual Christians as one would expect, yet the church has access to huge amounts of literature and marketing strategies.

However, in spite of all this, a country like Australia can be classified as post-Christian because of the lack of impact of the church upon general society, as seen in figures mentioned in chapter one. On the other hand, the New Life City Church, as part of the Asian Christian Community in Perth, seems to defy the usual trend of churches in the post-Christian areas in that it is a growing and outward reaching church.

The purpose of this study was to identify reasons for the Asian Christian community defying the trend of lack of growth experienced in many Western Christian churches in the post-Christian area.

In order to accomplish this task it was necessary in chapter one and two, firstly to investigate why many Western Churches are no longer relevant in their society by

studying their understanding of church and church growth and compare this understanding with how the Asian Christians, especially those in China, understand those concepts. In the study we realised that Western society has an enormous influence on those who form part of it. It even tries to form and define who individuals are or should be. This is also true of the church. Society influences the churches in many ways. In other words, society has a greater impact on the church than the church has on society.

Secondly, it was necessary in chapter three to look at the Biblical understanding of the Great Commission and see how the NLCC, as an Asian Christian Church that appears to be wall-less in a post-Christian setting, perceives their role in the Great Commission.

The study of the NLCC has relied heavily on personal testimonies of the different groups of the church interviewed (covered in chapters four – nine), on their interpretation of topics such as their understanding of church, church growth, the Great Commission, their understanding of God and how they perceived the importance of prayer. Other concepts discussed in the interviews with the NLCC members also included their understanding of worship, repentance, mission and servant-hood.

The surprising results on their understanding of the Great Commission and worship suggested that the researcher should also interview Western Christians and compare their understanding of the above-mentioned concepts. The results were just as surprising. We found that Western Christians, on the whole, did not view the Great Commission as a call from God that involved them on a personal level. They believed

that this is a general calling on trained missionaries. The NLCC members saw the Great Commission as a calling from God that they needed to obey on a personal level and corporately as a church, in order to spread God's Word.

Western Christians understood worship to be limited to activity within a church that involved music ministry and to a lesser extent, personal devotions such as prayer and Bible reading. However, the NLCC members saw worship of God in a far broader sense. They understood worship to extend beyond the church praising God within the church walls. In fact, they understood worship to include obedience to God in humility in all that God has called the church to do. This included living a holy and righteous life and taking the Gospel out into the market place outside of the church.

In other words, in chapter nine we saw that worship to the NLCC member is not only a corporate exercise by the church as a body of believers. Worship of God includes the understanding that individually they worship God in being obedient to Him in their daily lives. I suspect this has much to do with the fact that testimony sharing is a strong vehicle the church uses to reach outside its four walls. The NLCC members see worship as serving God in whatever capacity they are called. In other words, whatever they do in God's name is worship of God. It is in the light of the outcome of the investigation that a practical theological theory for church growth in the post-Christian area can be suggested.

The NLCC has been worth studying because we can implement certain strategies found within the church to change some perceived areas of lack within the Western

church (in Australia in particular). A wall-less Western church in Australia should have a greater impact on the society it finds itself in.

Based on the interpretation of the data obtained from the study via personal interviews and participant observation, the following section will define the differences that were found and reasons for the quick growth/maturation of first-generation Christians in the NLCC. This section will not simply restate conclusions from previous chapters, but will integrate conclusions into units and make suggestions regarding the church in the post-Christian area. To accomplish fruitful church growth, the post-Christian church should be aware of these differences.

10.1 You are the church

The NLCC has never seen the church as a building, but rather the individuals see themselves as the church and corporately as part of the worldwide group of believers; effectively they have a Kingdom vision. Christians are strengthened in groups (as seen below) and learn to apply God's Word in daily life. They are also equipped for meeting all the challenges of life through knowledge of the gifts of the Spirit and how to use them to God's glory in worship. The NLCC is a tight knit group who labour together as a family, believing that signs and wonders follow the preaching of God's Word. Signs and wonders following the preaching of God's word was raised particularly in chapter seven by the returned NLCC missionaries.

Spirit-filled and Word-confident Christians are the torch-carriers of the Gospel. They change a church from a 'come-structure' to a 'go-structure' in the sense that people are confident enough to go out and make disciples of all nations, instead of merely

inviting them to church in the hope that they may be converted there. The Christians' outlook is changed from being those who serve the church to those who serve God because they are the church. In other words, they believe the whole body of Christ is responsible for the spreading of the Good News, even if this means it is achieved one person at a time. The body of Christ, as a wall-less structure, then becomes a mobilized army of disciples rather than merely churchgoers. Then the church can become effective in the global village and use this concept to complete the Great Commission.

In order to accomplish growth the Western church should encourage each individual to see himself as the church – every individual Christian has a part to play. These individuals can only fulfil their part if they have been trained in discipleship and in so doing, have the confidence as Christians to reach out to the world. Once their confidence is built up in a loving environment of the small group, they are able to witness to people wherever they may find them. Then the church becomes a 'go and do' living body. This function in itself, shows the church to be wall-less and serious about completing the Great Commission.

These findings emphasise the importance of an outward-reaching church as discussed by Verkuyl. Johan Verkuyl states that if people decline to spread the Gospel among others, they are "...in effect sabotaging the aims of God himself."³⁸⁷

Verkuyl raises the issue that in the case of Israel as a 'chosen' nation, it also has a call to service, such as witnessing among the nations. He suggests that the New

³⁸⁷ Johannes Verkuyl, "Biblical Foundation." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 33

Testament call to the church is to spread the Gospel.³⁸⁸ God always initiates his work by involving people with him on a personal level according to Blackaby and Willis. Blackaby and Willis mention God reveals himself so that he may reconcile the world to himself. “When this mission is fulfilled, it will not only be the fullest expression of earth’s praise, it will be the fullest revelation of God’s love.”³⁸⁹ These comments strengthen the argument further that everyone in the church is called to spread the Gospel as demonstrated in the NLCC. Glasser further strengthens the argument by mentioning that the early church of Acts can be seen as a “witnessing community” by the unction of the Holy Spirit and by their speech or sharing of the Word.³⁹⁰

10.2 Mobilise the youth

The NLCC, as we saw in chapter 6, has a large number of youth who are seen as legitimate members of the church, and not just as youngsters under the care of the eldership. The youth are treated with respect within the church and are seen as part of the army of God, going out to reach the lost world. Mutual respect between the age groups in the NLCC creates a different perception of the youth. The perception of youth in the NLCC is not that they will one day grow up to minister in the church; but that they are Christians who can be used by God now. The youth have a Godly message and so they are relevant in the present day church and society. In this research of NLCC we have seen that when we set the youth free to worship, minister

³⁸⁸ Johannes Verkuyl, 27-29

³⁸⁹ Henry T Blackaby and Avery T Willis, “On mission with God.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 55-56

³⁹⁰ Arthur F Glasser, “The Apostle Paul and the Missionary Task.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorn, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 127

and testify; then the church will grow and individuals will mature. This concept was demonstrated further in chapter seven when we realise that younger missionary teams sent out from NLCC specifically targeted younger age groups on mission. The young people leave to go back to Asia because they have been international students in Australia. They take the Word back to their families and countries. They have been trained to testify about their faith and also to defend their faith. They have been nurtured in cell groups and youth groups and therefore they are able to withstand pressure from unbelievers when they go back to Asia. They are a mobile army of Christians bringing the Word to the unbelievers they come into contact with. They have the self-confidence to share their faith.

As we have seen in the study, the Asian family is close knit and community is important. When the young Christians return to Asia, they are able to evangelise their family and extended family. This is truly the wall-less church. The youth are newly qualified from university and therefore further their careers in the marketplace in Asia. The young person who has been disciplined in Christianity is able to make a difference wherever God places him. The wall-less church in action becomes the backbone for the completion of the Great Commission. In turn these returned Christians add to the movement in Asia known as the “Back to Jerusalem Movement”, as discussed in chapter two.

I believe that the Western church should become serious about seeing their youth active for Jesus. I do not mean, having lively youth meetings, but actually going out into the mission field, whether the mission field is within their community or further afield. The youth can only do this when they have been disciplined and trained

adequately in the Word. This is why nurturing in small groups and practicing testimony sharing is so important to every Christian.

Very few Western books publish articles on a mobilized youth. It appears as if literary coverage of youth ministry in the Western church is limited to youth meetings to amuse the youth and promote contemporary music. As seen in chapter six, NLCC is made up of about 75% young people. We saw that Word-based teaching and discipleship of the youth stimulates growth. Yonggi Cho mentioned that in the Asian churches most of the converts are under 35 years of age.³⁹¹ This is the same picture we have within the NLCC. The youth cannot be by-passed by church authority as too young to be useful. Every person is called to be actively involved in his church and further afield. The Asian church has learnt this lesson and they are reaping the results seen earlier in the study. Based on Cho's finding it appears that the multi-aged cell groups have a positive result on getting the youth involved in general church ministry. Rainer declared the importance of having an active youth in the church when they found that most churches make the mistake of waiting until generations reach adulthood while the most receptive time in a person's life is during the teenage years. They found that 81% of people who accept Christ do so before they are 20 years of age.³⁹² I believe that this is what this study has confirmed in the NLCC youth.

³⁹¹ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*. (US: Gainesville, Bridges-Logos Publishers, 2001), 83

³⁹² Thom Rainer, "The Great Commission to reach a new Generation." *Who will be Saved?* Paul R House and Gregory A Thornbury, Editors. (Illinois: Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2000), 195

10.3 Prayer power

From the founder members (discussed in chapter four) during the embryonic stage of the church up until today, prayer is considered a vital vehicle for serving God and knowing His plan and vision for the church and all its facets and functions. The NLCC, as the churches in Asia, have pray-ers as a special group within the church with their finger on the *pulse of God*, so to speak.³⁹³ Prayer is not only an activity before church celebrations or to open and close Bible studies, prayer is the mechanism that drives a church forward in the will of God. Pastor Yat Wan (referred to in chapter eight) sees prayer and witnessing as a way of life. I believe this combination forces a church to be outward- looking.

The more charismatic sections of the post-Christian church have most likely laid too much stress lately on apostles and prophets. The more traditional Western church has emphasised the role of the minister while church members are largely inactive. Pray-ers are the backbone of the church. They do not only pray to God – but listen for His reply. When God speaks, the church must move outside of its walls into the streets filled with the people who are totally unaware that Jesus shed His blood for them.

This study confirmed the importance of the role of prayer in the church. These findings are emphasised by Dickson who said that the promotion of the Gospel includes ‘...evangelism.... prayer, Godly behaviour and answering for the Faith...’³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Pulse of God- by this phrase I mean that God’s will for the church is made known through prayer. A church that takes prayer seriously will know the direction in which God is moving the body of Christ. When we know God’s will, we are obedient and more effective as a wall-less church.

³⁹⁴ John Dickson, *Promoting the Gospel*. (Australia: Sydney, Blue Bottle Books, 2005), 14

He has taken this aspect further by likening prayer to so-called 'hidden mission'.³⁹⁵

The importance of prayer is confirmed further by Frangipane who mentions that humility and prayer forms the foundation for authority to make disciples of Jesus. He believes that this authority will restore the church into a citywide church.³⁹⁶ Towns, as cited in Tenney, believes that "...revival is hindered by sin, prayerlessness and God's people refusing to repent..."³⁹⁷ MacArthur confirms the importance of prayer saying that pray-ers are selfless and the "...church benefits for their faithfulness."³⁹⁸ Ed Silvano asked the question as to whether prayer was the primary vehicle used to reach whole cities for Jesus. He said that "...prayer is the key to the successful fulfilment of the Great Commission, then and now."³⁹⁹

I believe that the importance of prayer cannot be underestimated in the Chinese church where persecution looms. Hattaway has drawn our attention to pray-ers in the Asian church and the leaders who spend days in prayer. He has also identified 'outward focussed prayer' as a spiritual principle that rids people of self-obsession and strengthens them in their Christian walk.⁴⁰⁰ I believe this will restore the church once more to a house of prayer.

10.4 Mission grows individuals and therefore the church

The mission arm of the NLCC is an important and dynamic part of the outreach of the church. Mission is seen as whole church responsibility. As has been demonstrated

³⁹⁵ John Dickson, *Promoting the Gospel*, 53

³⁹⁶ Francis Frangipane, *The House of the Lord*. (Florida: Lake Mary, Creation House, 1991), 123

³⁹⁷ Elmer L Towns, "Foreword" in *God's Dream Team* by Tommy Tenney (California: Ventura, Regal Books, 1999), 13

³⁹⁸ John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 63

³⁹⁹ Ed Silvano, "Prayer Evangelism", *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 154

⁴⁰⁰ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*. (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 152-156

in this research, everyone is invited to participate in missions as seen in chapter seven. The returned missionaries felt that they had grown spiritually in their mission trip and felt that they had sown a seed into the kingdom of God.

i) Love and service

The greatest difference between the attitudes to mission of the NLCC to the Western Christian who had gone on mission, is that the NLCC missionaries went to love the people and meet a physical need while they share the Gospel. The only Western missionary in the group interviewed in chapter seven felt that more goals should have been set and accomplished. However, the Asian NLCC missionaries left the mission area knowing that God would take care of the work they had started. The NLCC did not want to plant churches and leave their mark on the communities they visited. Rather, they wanted to be accepted by the local populace who would then find it easier to accept the Gospel message that they bring. They have a desire to see Perth and Asia saved for Jesus by carrying out the words of Jesus to complete the Great Commission. In the interviews they never felt overwhelmed by the task ahead of them, rather, they knew that every life saved, is another life that can go out and point somebody else to the Gospel.

We can learn from the NLCC attitude of not imposing themselves upon the group they evangelise. This finding is important and emphasised by the following authors. Hattaway brings this same aspect to our attention when he said that history has recorded that the Chinese church will never "...embrace a foreigner's religion." He confirms that the fledgling Chinese church at first saw Christianity as a Western

religion.⁴⁰¹ Bill and Amy Stearns warn against the “us-them” mentality where Christians see themselves as superior to the unbeliever. These condescending attitudes will not further the Gospel.⁴⁰²

ii) Great Commission – all are called by God’s Word

It is obvious to the researcher that the Great Commission is not seen by the NLCC as a task for the church corporately only, but rather, also the responsibility of all Christians in their daily lives. All the NLCC interviewees who went on mission felt that they went to serve God. Servant-hood is a strong character trait among those in the wall-less church who take the Great Commission seriously. This finding of the study ties in with Stott’s idea that we need to be “...global Christians with a global vision, for we have a global God.”⁴⁰³ Stott, as cited in Beougher believes that universalism is an enemy of evangelism. Stott goes further to say that “The true universalism of the Bible is the call to universal evangelism in obedience to Christ’s universal commission.” Stott believes that all people must have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.⁴⁰⁴ Tenney believes that servant-hood is important in bringing unity into the church in order to further the kingdom through outreach.⁴⁰⁵ Akind also stressed the importance of the church as the faithful witness and herald of Jesus and the Gospel in an ever-changing world.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*, (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 9

⁴⁰² Bill and Amy Stearns, “The Power of Integrated Vision”, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed. Ralph D winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 727

⁴⁰³ John R W Stott, “The Living God is a Missionary God.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 9

⁴⁰⁴ Timothy K Beougher, “Are all Doomed to be Saved?” *Who will be Saved?* Paul R House and Gregory A Thornbury, editors. (Illinois: Wheaton, Crossways Books, 2000), 104

⁴⁰⁵ Tommy Tenney, *God’s Dream Team*, (California: Ventura, Regal, 1999), 67-68

⁴⁰⁶ Daniel L Akind, “The Never-Changing Christ for an Ever-Changing Culture.” *Who will be Saved?* Paul R House and Gregory A Thornbury, editors. (Illinois: Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2000), 59

In this study it has been revealed that the Western church needs to see the link between the Word of God and the importance of the fact that it cannot be contained within a church. The Word must go out among the people so that the church becomes wall-less and serious about outreach. God's presence should be associated with Christians serving in God's name rather than with a building.

10.5 Word teaching

Word teaching is vital in growing mature Christians. The most effective way to encourage new Christians to investigate the Scripture further for themselves is when the minister preaches more Bible-based sermons. We have learnt in this study that the first-generation Christians (as seen in the interviews in chapter five) identified private Word study as vital in their Christian growth. An important finding in this study is that all first-generation Christians accepted responsibility for their own Christian growth and did not rely entirely on the pastor. Word teaching has led the NLCC to experience firsthand that all parts of Scripture are important and no part can be left out; hence the invitation by Jesus to complete the Great Commission is taken seriously by all converts. All have been called to spread the Word outside the walls of the church. In chapter eight we identified the pastor as a facilitator who preached the Word while the new Christians realised they had to 'feed' themselves in additional study. However, groups have been put in place in the NLCC to encourage further study in the word. These groups include cell groups, Christian education groups and youth groups as discussed more fully later in this chapter.

The Bible as the most important source for teaching in the church has been identified in this study of the NLCC. It has been confirmed as a vital source in the Asian churches too, where Hattaway suggests that the Bible stops being a book of knowledge and becomes a book of life.⁴⁰⁷ Althorp further confirms this finding when he suggests that Jack Hayford warned the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to “listen to the voice of the Scriptures”. Hayford implied that these movements often “strained the limits of God’s ‘sure Word.’” Althorp further suggests that there are an increasing number of people calling the church back to solid Biblical doctrine and practice.⁴⁰⁸ Ferguson, as cited in Azurdia III said that the preaching of the Word is the “...central gift of the Spirit given by Christ to the church.” Azurdia III suggests that Spirit empowered preaching will be evangelical in emphasis.⁴⁰⁹ Azurdia’s comment confirms the findings of this study that Bible based sermons must convict sinners and inspire outreach. The importance of Biblical preaching as a means to encourage outreach is further emphasised by Stott who said that the church’s commitment to world evangelism will be in proportion to the extent of its conviction on the authority of the Bible.⁴¹⁰

It seems that the post-Christian church should be encouraged to get back to Biblical teaching and to steer clear of too many Christian books, CD’s and programmes that may entertain rather than convict. Conviction through God’s Word is more effective in the church and leads to repentance, greater humility before God and so a deeper

⁴⁰⁷ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*. (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 152

⁴⁰⁸ Gary Althorp, *The Devil’s Playground: The Church*. 2nd Ed. (Singapore: Kings Publications, 1997), 159-160

⁴⁰⁹ Arturo G Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*. (Great Britain: Ross-Shire, Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 180

⁴¹⁰ John R W Stott, “The Bible in World Evangelism.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors. (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 21

and broader worship of God. Rediscovery of the true basics of the Scriptures may usher in renewal and growth in individuals and the church in general.

10.6 Interwoven themes usher in faith revelation and action

The following interwoven themes of repentance, coupled with cell groups, teaching testimony, Christian Education and discipleship will usher in a richer walk in redemption and sanctification and result in a greater faith revelation. This in turn will lead to a wall-less dynamic church where individuals grow, the church grows and the Great Commission appears more attainable.

i) Repentance

The NLCC attitude toward the importance of repentance has put the church in the position where it is not merely a sub-culture, but a counter-culture, where the new convert feels secure in the knowledge that he is being taught the pure, Word of God. The urgency that the kingdom of God is at hand is also raised daily during teaching. Repentance encourages obedience to God and this turning away from the old life to become a new creation makes the church counter-cultural, rather than merely a sub-culture that tolerates many sins of society in order to be acceptable socially. First-generation Christians in chapter five raised the issue of importance of repentance and turning away from their old beliefs in order to walk fully in their new-found faith.

When the Western church member is more confident to share their faith, they will acknowledge sin and call for repentance. I believe that repentance will serve to bring in a greater reverence for God; it will call Christians to a greater servant-hood in living the Gospel and spur them on to seek the Word. Lack of repentance prevents

past sins being dealt with and therefore leads to a lack of healing. Repentance forces us to the cross in humility and brokenness, character traits I observed in the NLCC church.

ii) Cell groups

Individuals are nurtured more intensively in the NLCC because of the strategies that have been put in place to help new Christians. Individuals are encouraged to join cell groups so that their salvation becomes a walk in conversion. This conversion takes place when the new Christian sees how to live the Good News. The discipleship that takes place is much like the strategy Jesus used where He taught the disciples in a practical way about salvation living. Cell groups and youth groups in the NLCC have much the same function. The individual is also cared for by members of the close knit group, where church life is lived out, where troubles and cares are shared and Biblical answers are found to life's questions. The cell group always encourages the new convert to be baptised as soon as possible. We have seen in chapter 3 that salvation and baptism follow in quick succession in the Chinese House churches. It appears that baptism as the public turning away from the old life and adopting the new Christian life is more effective than merely an altar call and a sinner's prayer repeated after the pastor. An altar call is a public confession of faith, but it appears to be more effective when followed up by close-knit fellowship with more mature Christians and baptism as soon as possible. We have seen the immediate baptism of several Christians in the early church as stated earlier in the study.

iii) Testimony sharing

The new converts are taught to talk about God in a non-threatening atmosphere of the smaller group. Here they learn to share their testimonies. Testimony sharing

becomes such a natural part of their Christian walk that they easily speak about the Lord in everyday life; hence they witness outside of the Christian group. This fact is un-common in the post-Christian Western setting in general because people do not easily share their beliefs outside of their church-life. The testimony sharing is another step towards becoming a wall-less church. I believe that the initial euphoria of becoming a Christian can be used in the testimony, thus the Spirit is not quenched as it so often is when the new convert becomes lost in a large church simply because they believe that they are too “new” or immature to have anything worthwhile to share.

It should also be mentioned that the new converts do not realise that it is difficult for most people to testify about their faith. They have experienced a nurturing environment of the NLCC where they are encouraged and so they do not find it unusual or difficult to speak out about their faith. In chapter eight, Pastor Yat Wan refers to new Christians having a living faith through relationship, nurturing of new converts in small groups and updated testimony sharing. In chapter four the founder members believe that testimony sharing was vital in the beginning stages of the church when they had no pastor. The first-generation Christians in chapter five stressed the importance of testimony sharing in their initial stages of witnessing to pre-Christian friends and family.

They believe that every time they testify, they build themselves up in faith, they build up the faith of others, and they glorify their Father. I believe that one of the secrets of being wall-less is to be ready to nurture new Christians in such a way, that they are built up in their faith with basic Christian knowledge in a loving

environment. This encouragement in the smaller group leads to a greater confidence to share the Gospel with those who do not know God. Immediately the NLCC has moved from having a new Christian to having a new, growing Christian who is encouraged in his faith walk, who is nurtured in the group and who is built up in faith enough through sharing testimony to be fearless in taking the church into the world.

iv) Discipleship

When the new Christians are nurtured within the groups, they are taken from a basic salvation experience to a conversion journey through discipleship. This is known as conversion growth, where new blood, so to speak, enters the church instead of the usual transfer growth often found in the Western church. New converts, when they are taught the Word, see this Word implemented in life. Therefore we see new Christians mature much faster because they realise that the road to discipleship is part of their journey in Christ. Discipleship is not considered an optional extra in the NLCC. Discipleship leads to fruitfulness in the Christian walk. Without discipleship and evangelism a church does not multiply as it should when we consider the Biblical implications of the Great Commission to 'go out and make disciples.' The founder members interviewed in chapter four demonstrated that care in smaller groups helped the initial Genesis group to become stronger Christians, as well as giving stability to international students in their new-found faith as Christians. Chapter five demonstrated that the first-generation Christians mentioned discipleship as vital for their first steps as new Christians.

Barna mentions relativism as an identifiable characteristic of the post-Christian church as described in chapter one. I believe the outcome of discipleship is that it prevents relativism and settles the new convert into a journey of conviction and obedience to God.

A converted Christian who is being cared for adequately is less likely to swap churches. We have seen during this study that church-swapping or church-hopping is a common phenomenon among the Western church Christians. We have observed that this occurs less in a nurturing environment where the converts are maturing quickly through strategies put in place by the NLCC.

v) Christian education

In this research, Christian education classes attended by all new converts have proved vital for the new Christians to learn about Christ and also to learn how to defend their faith as demonstrated in chapters four, five and eight. This means that the NLCC new Christian is less likely to waver under social pressure. Converts are strong enough, as a general rule, to withstand the tests of Western society.

Christians grounded in the Word, mature faster and reach out more easily to a lost world. Future growth in a church will need these strategies in place. I do not believe that the Lord will send an influx of first-generation Christians to an ill-equipped or ill-prepared Western church. Lack of teaching the Word may result in a Biblically illiterate church.

The cell group and the Christian Education class both help to mature the new Christian, but they have different functions. The cell group nurtures the new Christians and they learn to implement that which they learn from the Christian

Education classes by listening to others in the cell group. The cell group is about sharing and praying for one another in a brotherhood, whilst nurturing the new Christian. The two together have the effect of maturing the Christians far more quickly to the point where they easily share their faith with others outside the church walls. In other words, knowledge gleaned from Christian Education classes is put into action by living life through the cell group. This is how discipleship is best carried out. These smaller nurturing groups help to unify NLCC into a family. In chapter eight Pastor Yat Wan refers to community belonging through small groups as the undergirding of Christians in their faith walk. In these groups church vision is shared and becomes a common goal of the congregation, thus everyone has a Godly calling and purpose within the church, thus encouraging their growth walk.

This means that the Western church should seriously consider implementing Christian education classes as a matter of course. Christian education classes need not only be for first-generation Christians in the West. All new churchgoers need to complete a discipleship course, and the Christian education class has proved effective coupled with the nurturing found in the discipleship. These classes will give the Western Christians greater confidence to share their faith within their families and workplaces and so growth takes place – spiritual growth of the person sharing their faith, and growth of the church as numbers are added to the body. In Christian education classes the Christian is taught about the church; its function as well as its place in the Biblical calling of becoming the Bride of Christ. The fact that Jesus will come to fetch a spotless Bride gives the initiative to the education class to stress repentance and conversion.

The Western church in the post-Christian areas should encourage new converts to share their testimony in smaller groups as soon as possible. This is crucial in order to accelerate Christian growth. The post-Christian churches should be aware that salvation must be followed by conversion and discipleship, as Christians may not have any fundamental knowledge of the Gospel. This finding is further stressed with follow up in discipleship and Christian education classes as seen above.

It has been mentioned in this investigation that the Western church has striven to go back to the New Testament model of the church, but it appears that the model Jesus left us with has largely been ignored. The model I am referring to is the need to disciple new Christians in their Christian walk and so mature them to the extent that they can reach out to others. So they effectively become the arm of the church reaching out into society. In so doing, the church becomes a wall-less church and the Great Commission is taken seriously.

Groups of disciplined believers are more successful in outreach as proved by this study of the NLCC. This finding has emphasised the importance of group support as seen in Mittelberg on his study of the impact of team evangelism.⁴¹¹ Moore, as cited in Gordon suggests that discipleship takes the convert beyond personal holiness to bear fruit in personal witnessing, evangelism and soul-winning.⁴¹² Kraft suggests that salvation is an entry point only and not an end. He suggests that Jesus saw a “...prolonged process of teaching and learning...” where the disciples must come into

⁴¹¹ Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 211-240

⁴¹² Bob Gordon, *The Disciple's Handbook for the Spirit-Filled Life*. (England: Kent, Sovereign World, 1993), 12

the full freedom that Jesus promises.⁴¹³ In other words, the move is beyond conversion to freedom to communicate the Good News. The interwoven themes identified above in this study cannot be separated from one another. This aspect is further confirmed in the Chinese house churches that follow a salvation decision with group support through repentance, testimony sharing, cell groups, and Christian education. Hattaway emphasised these aspects when he identified similar traits in the house churches and especially those involved in the Back to Jerusalem Movement.⁴¹⁴ We have seen that this is one of the most successful growing church movements in the world.

10.7 Worship

I believe the most important finding in this study is the idea that the NLCC sees outreach and mission as worship of God.

The NLCC believes that the hallmark of a successful church is one that obeys God through spreading the Word. Structures built to accommodate numbers do not mean success, but rather, seeking to obey God by spreading His Word throughout the world. We have identified in this study that obedience to God comes with a price; that of sub-mission to God through humility of what the Saviour has done for us. Reverence for God is noticeable in the NLCC; God is worshipped as the Sovereign God of their lives as demonstrated in all the interviews with the different groups. Every facet of the Christian's life is devoted to God. God's laws and ways become the church's laws and ways hence obedience in outreach and the desire to complete the

⁴¹³ Charles H Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*. (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Chosen Books, 2002), 138-140

⁴¹⁴ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*. (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 16-20

Great Commission. The findings demonstrate that humility will bring us once again to the foot of the cross, where we meet our Saviour, are convicted of our sins and are filled with the Spirit to reach out to a whole generation going to hell while we keep ourselves busy within the four walls of the church.

It appears as though the post-Christian church has moved from needing God to needing programmes to entertain the masses. Therefore, reverence of God and humility will bring the Western church out of its four walls and into the marketplace. God then takes His rightful place not only in the church, but also totally in the lives of the Christian. In other words, God is not confined to the church, but now the Christian, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can impact the lives of his family, work place and further afield.

In this study it was found that the Asian Christian experiences worship differently to that of the general Western Christian. It has become apparent in the research that the Asian concept of worship is much broader as demonstrated in chapter nine.

Worship is not understood to be songs sung in praise and prayers offered, but rather, also the engagement in everyday life of servitude toward God and others.

This includes honouring God in service by giving of oneself in love within the local church, in the diverse service groups and further afield in mission and outreach. The local church is seen as family.

i) Servant-hood as worship

Obedience to God in the NLCC is seen as celebrating God's goodness and grace to a lost world by bringing His Word to the lost through testimonies shared, mission trips carried out and new Christians nurtured to maturity. In the NLCC worship also includes evangelising and going on mission as part of worship. Servant-hood is a

hallmark of worship as is walking humbly as an overcomer. When the Christians share their testimonies, they are considered to be bringing glory to God and therefore it is also considered as worship. Testimony sharing as worship is demonstrated in the founder members interviewed in chapter four, the first-generation Christians interviewed in chapter five, by the returned NLCC missionaries of chapter seven as well as the youth interviewed in chapter six. The NLCC members believe that personal holy living is a demonstration to the world that they are Christians. They believe that this is a demonstration of their worship of God. This finding of this particular study – particularly in chapter nine, is a far broader understanding of worship than I have perceived anywhere else.

i) Reverence, fear and obedience as worship

In the research, reverence and fear of God played a vital role in obedience to God and the Word and the desire to please God by completing the Great Commission.

The fear of God has led the NLCC to strive for holiness in all facets of their lives. They bow in submission to Him, a noticeable trait of their total worship of God in all areas of their lives. Rather than an outward sign of a large church, it is a church that walks in holiness and becomes a representative of Jesus to a dying world.

ii) Church labels

The NLCC believes it is more important to label a church on what happens outside of it than on what is going on within it. This is also a major difference between the Western and Asian churches. In the West people run to a church when they hear about a move of the Holy Spirit. The church is then labelled, for instance, as charismatic. In the NLCC, that which is done outside of the church labels it. That is, the NLCC is a wall-less church where willing servants of God are trained in

discipleship, nurtured in the holy life, sent into the mission field and bring the Word to the lost world and in so doing, carry out the Great Commission, person by person. The pastor of the NLCC strives to encourage all members in their particular spiritual gifts to use them to the glory of God in order to complete the Great Commission. The pastor has a kingdom vision rather than a church vision, another reason for not labelling a church by the function within its four walls, but rather, by its function and outreach outside the church walls. Every activity carried out within or outside of the church to further the kingdom of God is seen as the worship of God. This means that worship is not solely a corporate exercise of Christians together in a church service. Worship is also the act of every individual going outside of the four walls of the church to further God's kingdom in the context of their daily lives. This broad view of worship I have not encountered elsewhere in the post-Christian areas. It is unique and promotes the wall-less impression of the NLCC. In chapter 8 Pastor Yat Wan refers to 'ecclesia through worship.' The NLCC is not only a celebration-church but it is also a proclamation-church. Proclamation is the sharing of the Word outside of the church walls, thereby causing it to become wall-less. Proclamation (Word) shared (mission) is to worship God. Proclamation is one of the major differences revealed in this study between the Western and Asian churches; except that proclamation in the NLCC is defined as worship of God.

NLCC's broad view of worship identified in the study does not appear to be an isolated finding. Dickson suggests that historically the Jews in the Old and New Testament periods took "the idea of public worship as an act of mission." He goes further to say that Josephus documented that synagogue services attracted crowds

in Antioch whereby pagans were allowed to learn about Israel's public praise of God.⁴¹⁵ Piper suggests that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. He believes that passion for God overflows into zeal for missions. By this comment Piper has confirmed that worship and mission are joined as suggested in this study of the NLCC. He goes further saying "Missions is not God's ultimate goal, worship is." He believes that the missionary enterprise looks different the moment people understand worship in this broader context. Piper says "...the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal."⁴¹⁶

Hattaway has found a similar understanding of worship in the Chinese church as this study found in the NLCC. He said that evangelism is to glorify God and the reason for our existence on earth, and it is "... our main act of worship." Hattaway clearly states that worship is more than merely singing praises, it occurs every time a Christian does something that honours or glorifies Jesus.⁴¹⁷ This finding of Hattaway's ties in well with the finding of this study. However, the NLCC view of holy living as a tribute to worship God in daily life appears to be broader than Hattaway's, Piper's and Dickson's views. Here worship extends outside the walls of the church as the individual worships God through holy living and outreach. Worship is therefore, not only corporate worship of God in the church service, or outreach via mission of the church as a whole, but individual outreach in holy living. This holy living as worship encourages individual responsibility for growth in their Christian walk and results in a

⁴¹⁵ John Dickson, *Promoting the Gospel*. (Australia: Sydney, Blue Bottle Books, 2005), 131

⁴¹⁶ John Piper, "Let the Nations be Glad." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd Ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, editors (California: Pasadena, William Carey Library, 2004), 49-50

⁴¹⁷ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*. (UK: Carlisle, Piquant, 2003), 153

wall-less church of worshipping individuals who take the spreading of God's word seriously.

In the light of the interpretation of the data gleaned from studying the NLCC we could say that, in order for the post-Christian church to grow, it needs to see itself differently in the following ways:

-The Western church should view worship in a broader sense than it has in the past. Once the church realises that God is worshipped not only in celebration, but also in the proclamation of His Word outside of the church, we will see the wall-less church begin to take effect.

-Church should be understood as the corporate body of believers but also the individual Christians in whatever context they may find them-selves. The church must never be stagnant; it is a living body and should always represent Jesus through the life of individual Christians, wherever they are present.

-Church can never merely be defined as a certain age group or a certain maturity in spirit of the attendants. Church incorporates all ages and all levels of maturity as the living body of Christ. All these groups should be actively studying God's word and sharing their faith walk in their testimony as seen earlier in this chapter.

-Church is made up of individuals and families. Families strengthen a church, as we have seen in the NLCC where community rather than merely connectivity defines their strength.

-Church is the living body of Christ wherever Christians are present. Church cannot be confined within four walls, but needs to live the Good News within the world.

When all Christians realise they play a part in the Great Commission, we will have a church that is more aware of the greater body of Christ and therefore they develop a broader view of their role in the corporate body of Christ.

-Church growth cannot merely be defined as an increase in numbers within a church. Church growth may also be defined as the spiritual growth of individuals who make up the body of Christ.

-Church growth is intensified when all members are actively involved in the church. Church growth is secured further as soon as church members realise that they all have the capacity to spread the Gospel outside of the four walls of the church.

-When worship is seen in the broader context of both corporate and individual celebration and proclamation of God, then individuals are moved to servant-hood where outreach and mission are carried out to the glory of God. When this happens, the church will grow and be relevant – even in a post-Christian society. Worship and mission are intimately related and strengthen individual Christian growth and corporate growth of the body of Christ as we stand in awe of Him once more.

-The NLCC understanding of worship goes beyond mission and servant-hood to holy living on a daily basis that becomes a continual witness of God to the post-Christian society. This is the unique finding of the NLCC as a wall-less church.

10.8 Implications of this study and a call to further research

This particular study had to limit itself to the main perceived differences between the Asian and post-Christian church that could make a difference in church growth and spiritual growth. There are many other interesting aspects that were not within

the scope of this study and therefore could not be explored further. The other areas identified where further research is necessary are indicated below.

- I believe that this research has only taken a small facet of the Asian church in Perth into consideration. Additional study is called for in order to reach wider conclusions. The opinion-bouncing groups questioned on their understanding of the Great Commission and worship was Australian. One needs to wonder if a different Western country's opinion-bouncing group would have given a different outcome.
- Many members of the NLCC have family in Asia, but we need to ask the question whether Asian Christian churches situated further geo-graphically from Asia than Australia, have the same character traits. A larger group of Asian Christian churches in different areas will need to be researched in order to come to more diverse conclusions.
- This study has been limited to the understanding of church and church growth of the NLCC. We have also limited our understanding of the Great Commission to include soul winning and discipleship. The broader understanding of the Great Commission could not be included within the constraints of this study.
- There are 13 Asian churches operating in Perth. NLCC is one of the few conducting services in English. Most other Asian churches cater for the Asian community who have a language problem because there are many different languages and dialects spoken in Asia. For instance, in Perth, a Korean church uses a different language to a Thai church. The NLCC works closely with these

churches in that the ministers support and encourage one another. The other Asian churches in this group are also concerned about outreach to Asia.

However, for the purposes of this study, I had to limit this study to the church where I, as a participant observer, could understand the language and specifically perceive a wall-less character trait.

- Pastor Yat Wan is valued within the Asian church community for his outreach efforts within Perth and further afield in Asia. He is a regular attendant of the Lausanne Forum. Pastor Yat Wan is regularly asked to preach in the other Asian churches in Perth. In this study, it was not possible to see whether he influenced these churches to outreach and mission by his sermons.
- Pastor Yat Wan is well known in Perth for his efforts to unite all the churches of Perth at least once a year for a combined open-air service, often towards the end of the year. It would be impossible to include all these churches within the limits of this study.
- -Pastor Yat Wan preaches in Singapore on a regular basis. It is not unusual for members of the NLCC to work in Singapore and come home to their families for weekends. Dual citizenship of many NLCC members allows for easy access to Asia and promotes easier out-reach/mission to these areas. Once again, this study cannot include all the areas that the NLCC influences.
- A large percentage of the Perth population is made up of Asian immigrants who have dual citizenship with an Asian country or are international students. It will be impossible, within the scope of this study, to determine the final outcome of

the influence these returning Asian Christians have on the Asian spiritual climate when they return home to Asia. These Christians have an influence on the Back to Jerusalem Movement progressing through China toward the west. Their influence on the Back to Jerusalem Movement is another study that could be considered in further research.

- The NLCC does not have contact with churches in the other states of Australia. Perth is the most isolated capital city in the world. The nearest neighbouring capital city would be Singapore. Sydney on the east coast of Australia is a five-hour flight away or at least a three day journey by car across the Nullarbor Desert. However, Asia is well represented in the eastern states of Australia with a large percentage of Asian immigrants living there too. It is not within the limits of this study to determine the extent that the other Asian churches are well-less within the rest of this country or for that matter, to determine their influence in Asia. This aspect also calls for further research. It will be obvious to the reader that a large percentage of Asians living within Australia will and does influence the cultural atmosphere of the country. It may be of value to do further research into the influence the Asian Christian will ultimately have on the post-Christian Australian community. As a participant observer it is noticeable that many Catholic churches in Australia have Asian ministers. This was also commented on by the Catholic couple that I interviewed in chapter nine regarding their understanding of worship.
- More in-depth study is recommended as regards the depth and breadth of worship. I mean that more study should be undertaken to find out why worship

has become a narrow concept in the Western church where it may be understood only in the corporate sense, and often only from a music point of view. I believe that when the Western church understands worship in the broader sense of the NLCC's understanding thereof, the church may move beyond its walls to become a body of individuals who live the holy life in worship of God, even in the market-place.

10.9 Practical theological concepts for a wall-less church

Our investigation suggests that the Western church has not lost its heart for mission; it has rather simply forgotten that the Great Commission is an order to every Christian in the church, not merely those called to do mission work. The Western church realises that every Christian is on mission daily as we go about our lives, but how can this trend be instilled in all members of the church with a fruitful result? I believe only by instilling the themes of repentance, cell groups, discipleship, Christian education and testimony sharing, as discussed above. We, as church members may be the only representative of Jesus that some people meet, simply because in the post-Christian society, people are not naturally inclined to go to church because they have missed out on the familiar upbringing of church on Sunday of a generation ago.

I believe, based on the results of this investigation that we in the post-Christian areas have failed to equip Christians to share their testimony from an early stage of their Christian walk. The church needs to go out into the world. The investigation shows that the world has moved into the church i.e. influenced church function because Christians have not had the confidence to reach outside the walls of the church. The

Gospel is meant to be confrontational, but in general, the Western world does not want to be confronted. Confident testimony sharing from an early stage in salvation and conversion, cultivates an atmosphere where the Word and the outreach are inseparable. NLCC believes in ongoing worship through ongoing testimony. They believe that when they live in holiness, they live in perpetual worship. This phenomenon has not been identified in other churches, which I have studied and is therefore unique to NLCC. The understanding of worship in the NLCC is far broader than I have encountered anywhere else.

Practical theology helps us determine how we can bring the Word of God most effectively into the context of the life being lived. The Word of God has great power, but it needs to be in contact with the human life in order to see its full potential and thus give glory to Father God. In other words, in this practical theological investigation we have identified several vehicles that take the Word out into the world so that the church becomes wall-less because it takes into consideration the society in which that Word is to be preached. The vehicles suggested earlier include discipleship, Word teaching via Bible based sermons and Christian education classes. Other vehicles that help take the Word into the world include spiritual growth within the nurturing atmosphere of the cell groups and mobilization of the youth groups who have been thoroughly grounded in the Word and taught to defend their faith through testimony sharing. Christians who are able to defend their faith are secure and have self-confidence outside the walls of the church. We saw in chapter one that practical theology is always in dialogue. It has certainly proved the case between the church and outreach into the world.

The Word has great power within the church and wherever it is preached; but there can be no growth until that Word is taken out into the streets, outside the church walls. By growth is meant that the person, who shares the Gospel outside of the church, grows and matures more in their faith when they testify. The church also grows more numerically when the Gospel is shared in the market place, because it attracts people to be aware of the Gospel and so they start to ask questions about salvation and faith in general. However, all new Christians must be nurtured through the conversion process.

Therefore, practical theology, when properly implemented and understood, is the study that identifies the mechanisms to bring forth church growth numerically within a denomination and individually by maturing the individuals because in reaching out to others, they themselves grow or mature in their faith walk. In other words, practical theology considers the context in which the Word will be spread. It then formulates theories on how the word of God may be effectively forced out of the church and into the streets where mission can take place. This in effect means that Christians begin to cultivate a Kingdom of God vision rather than just a church vision.

I acknowledge that the greatest difference between the Western church and that of the NLCC is the fact that the Great Commission is understood as the calling upon the life of every individual. Added to this finding is the fact that the NLCC believes the church to be every individual, but also the corporate body of believers wherever they may find themselves. Therefore the testimony of the Christian is a vital vehicle to take the Word of God out into the community. When the Word goes out in this way by the testimony of every Christian within the church, the church essentially

becomes a wall-less church. A wall-less church is a church that takes the Great Commission seriously. However, I do not imply that only wall-less churches take the Great Commission seriously. There are many churches that endeavour to complete the Great Commission

These Christians also believe that success in a church is a group (all ages) of believers who obey God, mature in faith and reach out to others along the way. They believe that in sharing their faith, they bring glory to God. The greatest way to worship God is to obey Him in spreading the Gospel to all creation and so complete the Great Commission. Worship and mission are inseparably linked. However, mission is not seen as outreach overseas only. Mission is seen as daily outreach in everyday life by living a life of holiness in worship of God. This is the most unique and broadest view of worship that I have encountered.

In this investigation we found that the NLCC is most successful in growing Christians to maturity quickly so that the new Christians themselves reach the stage where they witness and reach out to others much faster than in the general Western church. This finding is vital in the light of many new Christians who will come to salvation in the post-Christian church; however, they may be classified as first-generation Christians because many will have no basic Biblical knowledge. However, the post-Christian church will find the nurturing concepts of the NLCC identified in this study, useful in supporting all new Christians.

It should be brought to the reader's attention that the NLCC broad view of worship may only be cultivated over time within a church when the church returns back to the basics of Biblical teaching and the example of discipleship set by Jesus.

This research has shown that the NLCC has similar characteristics to Asian house churches in China in the sense that they are wall-less and take outreach and mission seriously and consider it as worship of God. They do not rely on the pastor to do the outreach; they all labour with him.

In this study we have only looked at certain aspects of the NLCC as regards church growth and spiritual growth. It should be brought to the reader's attention that this particular study has been limited to soul-winning and discipleship as a means to help complete the Great Commission. The NLCC has understood church growth to mean firstly, the growth of individuals as they mature in their Christian walk and secondly the growth of the church by an increase in numbers. In the light of this understanding we have seen that the NLCC concentrates on maturing Christians so that they can individually be vehicles to spread God's word in a confident way in whatever situation they may find themselves in. The proclaiming of God's word is seen as worship of God, therefore worship is seen in a broader context as it takes place outside the walls of the church and is not limited to that which takes place within a church building. This is a hallmark of the wall-less church.

We have identified these findings within the NLCC and under each of the relevant sections we have confirmed them with additional literature from other authors who have identified or emphasised similar theories.

We can conclude by saying that this particular research has shown that Christians are called to worship God in obedience in every facet of their lives. God cannot be contained within a church building; the life giving Word needs to go outside the walls of the church. For the Kingdom to advance, redemption must be joined to revelation

and mutual responsibility. Church growth is the present expanding reign of God via individual testimony through the Holy Spirit; but it can only come to fullness in the Last Day with the return of Messiah.

William Booth once said

“No sort of defence is needed for preaching outdoors, but it would take a very strong argument to prove that a man who has never preached beyond the walls of his meetinghouse has done his duty. A defence is required for services within buildings rather than for worship outside of them.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ *More Great Quotes.* <http://www.sermonIndex.net>
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