

Evangelism and Mercy Ministries

Part 1: Why?

Options for Christians in the face of social deprivation and breakdown:

- (1) They may abandon concern for "personal salvation" in favour of social reform and social action. (*The so-called "Social Gospel" approach*)
- (2) They may "close their eyes" to such problems, and insist that ultimately all that matters is conversion and personal salvation.
- (3) They may seek to meet such needs ("works of mercy") AND to proclaim the gospel of personal conversion to Christ ("words of salvation").

Proposition:

Christians (and the Church) should seek to meet the physical and social needs of those around them, in the closest possible connection with their work of proclaiming salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, boldly and graciously. The two activities are intertwined; both are part and parcel of the work of advancing the kingdom.

1. Why we should do Mercy Ministries (MMs) as well as Preaching

- 1) They display God's real love and character of grace
- 2) They distinguish Christianity from empty religion (Matt 5; James 1 & 2)
- 3) They build true fellowship/ community – prepare for Paradise

2. Why Mercy Ministries must never be separated from Preaching

- 1) Deeds without words are dumb
- 2) God always explained his saving deeds
- 3) MMs address the consequences of sin, for which the gospel is the only ultimate remedy.

3. Where do they fit in with our Preaching?

- 1) They may bring people to hear our preaching
- 2) They may open people's hearts to listen to our preaching
- 3) They give weight and authority to our preaching
- 4) They may take us to the very people whom God is preparing for our preaching
- 5) They give insight, relevance and sympathy to preachers
- 6) They support and nurture the impact of our preaching
- 7) They indicate whether our preaching is Biblically effective

Part 2: What?

What needs do people have?

“Man was made dependent on God, but as a result of sin is alienated from Him, and under His wrath and curse (Gen1-3; Rom 1) - this is man's *Theological Need*.

Man was made to be an integrated harmonious whole, at peace with himself. As a result of sin, man has become afraid, and prone to all manner of sin, unhappiness, frustrations, hatreds and guilt - this is man's *Psychological Need*.

Man was made male and female, to live in perfect harmony and fulfilment. But sin caused man and woman to blame each other, and quickly brought alienation and violence into the family (Cain and Abel). Later, sin led to the social fragmentation at Babel, and to all the social disruptions (James 4:1-3) - this is man's *Social Need*.

Man was made to be steward over God's perfect creation, enjoying it in perfect peace and safety. As a result of sin, man finds that the earth is cursed, full of frustrations and dangers. His life is at the mercy of violent natural phenomena, of wild animals, of disease, poverty, and starvation. Man's very body is decaying towards death. - this is man's *Physical Need*

What MMs may churches develop?

A short list of examples:

Ministries to the elderly:

- Visiting the lonely and house-bound
- Shopping assistance
- Care Home visitation
- Bereavement support
- Phone ministry
- Crisis care in winter
- Support groups for relatives of elderly & disabled
- Outings and social events

Ministries to young professionals, home-based mothers, etc:

- Social networking
- Arts groups
- Film discussion
- Mums and toddlers
- Baby-sitting group
- Crisis pregnancy

Ministries for immigrants:

- ESOL classes
- Friendship groups
- Outings and festival feasts

Ministries for kids

- Clubs
- Homework clubs
- Career guidance and training

Ministries for materially-impooverished:

- Food Banks and Clothes Cupboards
- Advice/help for battered women, etc

Lectures, Courses and Support-groups

Marriage
Divorce-recovery
Parenting skills
Raising teenagers
Drug-proofing your kids
Helping People with Disabilities

Environmental and Ecological

Neighbourhood cleanliness
Beauty and safety

Part 3. How?

A template for developing a MM

1. Strategy

What you're trying to achieve, and where it fits in with your gospel priority

See "Circles" diagram (page 4)

Pray

2. Method

1) Start where you are – local needs and opportunities

2) Start where you are – people and resources you have

3) Research - Numbers, challenges, competitors/partners, pitfalls, compliance, models

4) Plan – realism, growth, risks. How to make contacts.

5) Recruit – with caution and faith

6) Link - discuss with evangelism and preaching planners. District visiting

7) Pray

3. Check

1) Don't start what you can't continue

2) Don't wait till everything's perfect

3) Is your motivation a godly love for people, or is it idolatrous?

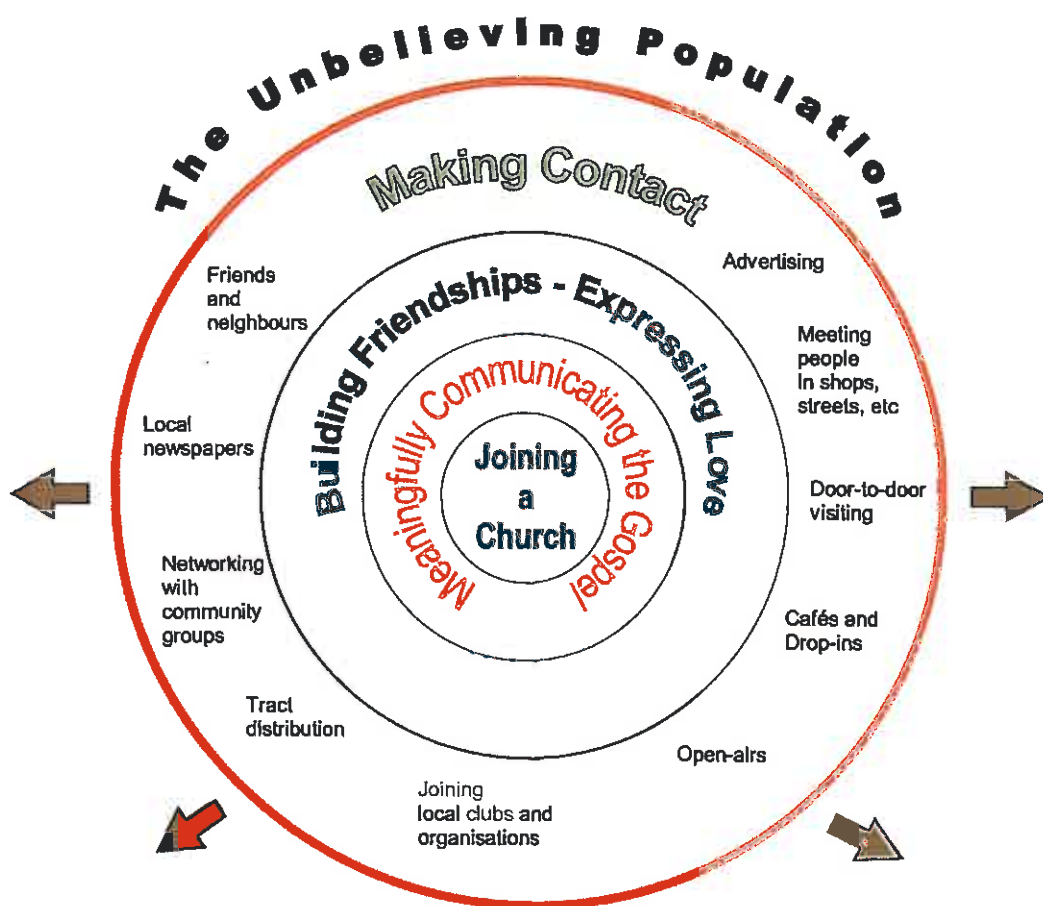
4) When and how will you review the work?

5) What will come next?

Works of Mercy come not only in the second circle (“Building Friendships, Expressing Love”), but also in first circle (“Making Contact”) – and also in the third (“Meaningfully Communicating the Gospel”) e.g. in a “Road to Recovery” Group for addicts.

Also, *Works of Mercy* may assist a person to join a church, integrating them into a caring fellowship. Many of the people who benefit from a church’s *Works of Mercy* before they become Christians, may need active diaconal care throughout their lives

(e.g. some Muslim converts; people with special physical, psychological or social needs)



CHRISTIAN CHARITY

or, The Duty of Charity to the Poor, Explained and Enforced

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 *"If there be among you a poor man..."*

1. The Duty Explained

- i) it is the duty of the people of God to give *bountifully* to supply the needy;
- ii) it is the duty of the people of God to give *freely* and without grudging;
- iii) it is a duty to which God's people are under very strict *obligations*.

2. The Duty is insisted on throughout the Bible

- i) it is reasonable, since the poor are also created in God's image;
- ii) it is especially reasonable, since God has freely given so much to us in Christ.

3. Exhortation to this Duty

- i) Consider that what you have is not your own, but only lent to you by God;
- ii) God looks on the charity we do to our neighbours as if it is done to Him;
- iii) It is often spoken of as a basic characteristic of a godly man, that he is charitable;
- iv) The Bible encourages us that we shall never be losers by giving to others;
- v) God threatens to curse those who do not give to the poor;
- vi) Consider that you and your family may one day need charity yourselves.

4. Objections that are sometimes made against this Duty

- i) "I am unconverted, so can't give charity in a right spirit - so it would do no good."
- ii) "If I give charity, it will only make me self-righteous."
- iii) "I've given to the poor before, but it's never done me any good, despite the promises of God's blessing to givers."
- iv) "The poor I meet are not desperately poor - do they really need help?"
- v) "The poor I meet are ill-tempered and ungrateful, and they don't deserve any help."
- vi) "I'm not that well off myself - I can't really spare anything."
- vii) "I can't tell if this person is genuine - I can't give till I'm sure."
- viii) "We're not obliged to give to the poor until they ask for help - then I'll give."
- ix) "The poor have brought it on themselves by their own fault."
- x) "It's the responsibility of others - their relations, more wealthy people, etc."
- xi) "The law and the government make sufficient provision for the poor."

Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol 2, p 163-173

SELECT READING LIST

Timothy J Keller: "Ministries of Mercy – the Call of the Jericho Road"
(Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing)

Timothy J Keller: "Generous Justice" (Hodder)

Harvie Conn: "Evangelism – Doing Justice, Preaching Grace"

Thomas Chalmers: "The Parochial System" (Works, volume 12)

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