

IS THERE A PLACE FOR LARGE SCALE MISSIONS TODAY?

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Is there a place for large scale or town-wide missions today? My first reaction is to say, 'No'. The day when churches engaged either on their own or together in a major mission is over. Evangelistic programmes like Alpha or Emmaus are the way ahead.

And yet I suddenly find myself proposing to my town-centre colleagues that we engage together in a major mission in 2007. How come this change of mind?

The seed of the idea was born a few months ago when the newspapers were full of divisions in the Anglican church over women, homosexuals, freehold and the like. Although, thank God, the spotlight was not on Baptists, my heart sank. What a terrible witness this was to the transforming and reconciling power of the Gospel.

It was this negative portrayal of the Christian faith which convinced me that the churches of the town needed to do something together. Not just the evangelical churches, but all the churches; and, in particular, the town-centre churches – the Cathedral, the Roman Catholics, the Methodists, the URC, the Salvation Army and the Baptists. For the fact is that in spite of our diversity, we are essentially one. . For although we 'do church' in differing ways, we have a common faith in Jesus, crucified and risen. The Apostles Creed belongs to us all – 'We believe in Jesus'.

My vision of this celebration of Christian life and witness is that for a period of ten days, under a common strap-line such as 'We believe in Jesus', churches – individually and together – will affirm their faith in Jesus. I envisage every church displaying the same banner and posters declaring 'We believe in Jesus'; posters in the windows of every home where there are Christians declaring 'We believe in Jesus'; and stickers on every Christian car! Just as in the run-up to a General Election people declare their party loyalty with signs saying 'Vote for Bloggs', so in these 10 days of celebration every Christian will declare their loyalty to Jesus.

Although there may well be united services, there will be Christian witness beyond church premises. Stalls, for instance, down the high street - with Christian clowns, puppets, street drama, bands, and black Gospel. We could have a church fun day in the park – although whether tug-of-war between various churches would be a good idea might be open to question.

Along with classical concerts (Handel's *Messiah* or Brahms's *German Requiem*), there should also be brass bands and modern worship bands sounding the praise of Jesus; 'Songs of Praise' for traditionalists, and perhaps a 'Gymanfa Ganu' organised by the Welsh Society. There could be drama and art competitions in the schools; a debate with the humanists in County Hall; Christian speakers at all the town's Rotary clubs; Christian beer mats in every pub.

Precisely how the churches affirm their faith in Jesus will vary from church to church. But, one thing for sure, the world will see that we are one – and God willing, there will be those who believe.

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