

A Place to Belong

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Over the years I have experimented with a variety of 'strap lines' for our church in Chelmsford.

At one stage, for instance, stated on church publicity were the words, *Central Baptist Church – going Christ's way and making disciples*. Perhaps for church people this constant reminder of our mission statement was helpful, but frankly it must have meant very little to people outside the church.

More recently, we used to say on letters going out from the church: *Central Baptist Church – transforming lives and changing community*. No doubt for church people this constant reminder of two of our values was helpful. Furthermore, it would have had some meaning for people outside the church. It was not, however, an attractive statement. True, it might have attracted Christians in other churches to be part of our community, but I can't see it holding much attraction for people of no faith.

So I dreamt up another strap-line: *Central Baptist Church – a place to belong*. Ideally I would have preferred to have stated: 'Central Baptist Church – *the* place to belong', but some of my colleagues felt that was over-egging it! This surely is a much better strap-line as far as Jo (or Joe) Public is concerned. In a world where many are lonely and are crying out for community, people want to belong to a group where they feel loved, valued and affirmed. On reflection, we need to make more of this strap-line: we need to create well-produced car stickers for people to use!

Of course, there is a danger in using such a strap-line. People within the church could be lulled into believing that this is the sum purpose of our being. If, for our members, church is simply 'a place to belong', then very rapidly we adopt a club mentality. This in turn leads to the terminal illness '*fellowshipitis in extremis*'. It is at our peril that we forget that our mission is in fact to 'go Christ's way and make disciples'.

The fact is that, for internal purposes, we need mission statements. We need to remind ourselves that '*we exist to go Christ's way and make disciples*'. We need vision statements such as '*We want to be a strong and vibrant town-centre church where every member is passionate for God, passionate for one another, passionate for others, passionate to grow in the faith, and passionate to serve Jesus*'. Indeed, we need value statements: '*In our life together we seek to reflect the following aspects of a genuine Jesus community: warm and welcoming, risk-taking and God-trusting; excited and enthusiastic; sacrificing and resourcing; transforming lives and changing culture*'.

For those outside the church, however, we need an attractive strap-line, such as: '*Central Baptist Church – a place to belong*'.

What about your local church or Christian community? Do you have such a strap-line which works for you in your place of ministry? If so, why not share it with the rest of the Ministry Today network. We'll publish the best in a future edition of Ministry Today.

Meanwhile, this edition is full of good things, including a major article by Clive Jarvis about how we welcome visitors and newcomers to our church gatherings. Our editor, Alun Brookfield, whose early adult life was spent teaching music, has written a provocative article about how we attach divine value and provenance to our musical tastes.

If you're planning a retreat, there's a sample lectionary for devotional reflection, and a sample Code of Practice for ensuring that communications within a church community always maintain the highest possible standard of effectiveness and integrity.

And, of course, there are the usual host of book reviews.

Do write and tell us what you think of our journal, offer suggestions for improvement or send articles. But most of all, enjoy Ministry Today.