

Allies

Allies are people who share and respect the values held by the organized church, but who do not easily fit into the way we operate. Many of these people, who may want to join in what God is doing in the world, have little interest in becoming members of a religious institution.

We might find these people on the local city or regional council. Or in the local business community. Perhaps people involved in playgroups or Alcoholics Anonymous. It might be people who consider themselves 'Uniting' when it comes time for the census. These may be people who adhere to other religious beliefs. We might not get them to attend weekly worship. But they may become partners in mission as they consider how they put into practice their concern for the welfare of the community.

Having three-way conversations can get us beyond the dualist competition that so often breaks out between local and regional, congregational and agency, us and them.

Exiles

Exiles are people who have pulled out of the organized church, yet who continue to exercise faith in action. Alan Jamieson, in his book, 'A Churchless Faith', describes a wide range of people who were once active members of local congregations and parachurch organizations, but who continue to follow Christ. George Barna writes about these people in his book, 'Revolution', describing an emerging network of Christians who have lost patience with congregational business and who want to get on with living as followers of Christ.

Many 'exiles' leave the Church because of frustration and disappointment. The 'Get Up and Go' people have 'got up and gone' when dreams, plans and possibilities were stifled or stonewalled. If we want to develop fresh and innovative approaches to mission, reaching new groups of people, we'd be well advised to consult with the Exiles.

We're sometimes tempted to write people off because they don't belong to our group, like some of Jesus' disciples. In Luke 9: 49-50 John answered, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.' But Jesus said to him, 'Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.'

Each of these networks of people will be needed as we explore what it means to be the people of Jesus in mission in Australia. They each have strengths and liabilities. They can work separately, and usually do. But what happens when we work together? Sometimes it's disastrous! We struggle over the bottom line, the end result, 'what's in it for us'. Occasionally we're able to share resources, networks and insights.

If we engage with our community with a sense of poise, knowing who we are and whose we are, we more able to engage in partnerships with those outside our immediate circle.