

and plant. No longer can we ‘build it’ and expect that people will come. We’ve noticed the changes even in the last fifty years. What worked in a cohesive community in the 1950s is difficult to achieve in our splintered communities today.

Unlike the early church, here in Australia we generally do not face a hostile world. As members of the Uniting Church we experience good will from community members, often because of a strong heritage of service provision. There is a danger of course that we’ll be seen as service providers rather than as a community of everyday faith. Some people see us as a community of Sunday worship only.

We’re aware of the fluid nature of our community. People come and go. They travel long distances to be with their friends and family. People sample community, trying out different churches, clubs and shopping centres. We need to find a way of being committed at the core, open at the edges.

We face the challenge of how we relate to a society in which one of the highest values is that of individual choice and freedom. While encouraging personal responsibility and celebrating diversity of cultural expression, the people of Christ live out the good news of community in which people of all backgrounds can genuinely love one another.

We face a temptation to develop a safe environment, a parallel universe, in which Christians are safe from the ‘outside world’. However it is no easy task to simply enter existing networks in the community, particularly when our mobile lifestyle lead to people building networks with friends and family that have little connection with where people live.

Let’s not overlook the breathing in of the Holy Spirit. We too readily discount the impact of Jesus’ action because of our concern to distinguish ourselves from the Pentecostals, or our discomfort with the thought of being breathed upon! Jesus’ action counters our tendency to over-intellectualise what we are doing. We desperately need the continuing inspiration of God, the time to draw close to Jesus as a community and be strengthened for mission.

Can you think of places in the world where the church might be living in this framework?

If Jesus were to stand with you today in this 21st century setting, and say, “As the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit”, where would you start? To whom does Jesus send you?