

Phillip Jensen – SEGP Conference Feb 3rd 2007

Question and Answer session

1. What are the pros and cons of planting new congregations in existing buildings vs a new congregation elsewhere?

A building that's already up is cheap; a building you're already using is cheap, because you're paying most of what you need to pay for in terms of maintenance and the rest of it, so we're just talking sheer economics. In economics terms you've got land, you've got capital, you've got labour and you just apply these to your issue. I want to get as much value I can out of the buildings we've got. However, some buildings are totally unsuitable for what you're trying to do, either because of location or because of pillars....and so you then have to work out whether to go somewhere else for what needs to be done.

St Andrew's Cathedral is not a perfect building. However, we are on top of the busiest railway station in Sydney, on the main street of Sydney, sharing a square with the Town Hall, and we have our own car park underneath – that's a pretty good location for a building. So you've got to weigh it up – we get 50 visitors every day, and we gave away 10,000 evangelistic tapes and CDs in 3 years, so the location weighs against any difficulties of the building.

2. In the Church of England, E churches can go on forever because of the quota system which forces B churches to subsidise them. Should the B churches continue to pay?

I don't always understand your quota system and things change so excuse me, I haven't got enough lifetime to understand the labyrinth of your systems. But when you put resources into an A church, you are helping the church provided that you don't put too many in. When you put resources into an E church, it's good money after bad. The most it can produce is palliative care – you may slightly change the angle of the decline but you're actually not helping anything. And so it is a sheer, absolute, complete waste of money. It's got nothing to do about points of theology – I'm not talking bad churches/good churches, but as a businessman you are wasting money big time – no-one would do that, it's just daft. This is the problem with centralised planning. Now, you cannot work out from this comment whether I vote Conservative or Labour but capitalism is a filthy system of greed and competition and destructiveness. Socialism is a stupid system whereby it is built on greed and rivalry and covetousness as well. Christians should be neither in my view as neither of them are Christian. However, in capitalism, individuals go bankrupt and nobody cares. In socialism, everybody goes bankrupt – there's your choice.

How does everybody go bankrupt? Well, because in B churches are forced to put their resources into E churches – and that's stupid. If that is what you're in you've got to change your system because these B churches can't do their work for growth because they're having to give palliative care to churches who should close up. Now someone up in Scotland was telling me they're giving 60% of their income into the central fund. So they want to put on an extra staff member but they can't afford it. They could afford it if they weren't giving anything but they've got to give so much they can't afford it – so it's a

growing church that is not being able to grow because they've got to fund a little church around the corner that will never grow. Now only someone who has been appointed as a master of managed decline could come up with a system like that. But anybody who is a master of a system will never change the system as any system that makes me a master of it must be a good system mustn't it? That's why we need auditors. If this quota thing is even vaguely true you need to get some businessmen to come in and audit the Church of England and help the Church of England understand that it's bankrupt. This process is going to bankrupt everybody and you'll never get the church to grow as long as this process is in place.

3. 'Put mission before people' – this causes a great conflict – we're a B church short on resources and people, but there are so many needy people in the congregation. We'd love to be a mission church, help!

Yes, the needy people you've got to look for are the new Christians and the non Christians. They're the ones in real need. Our needs are really small in comparison. Sure I would like to have more friends and would like to solve some of my personal/interpersonal issues, and...but my neighbour is going to hell. Excuse me, but there is a bigger problem round the corner. OK you've filled my teeth, that's lovely, but what about that person round the corner's cancer? While you have spent all your resources filling my teeth, he is dying of cancer. We need to get perspective here. The more you pay attention to the personal pastoral pains of the congregation, the less the congregation is paying attention to the lostness of humanity. And that's the balance you've got to work at. So when you see people converted, you will have pastoral problems, but they won't be like the pastoral problems of the congregation. They'll be 'this man has three wives and four children by other women'. How are we going to help him sort that mess out, rather than 'my wife and I had a tiff last night' – well go home and sort it out.

4. Granted that there are complications with the social gospel, is there any place for social action in evangelism and general ministry in such a needy community?

Social action always swallows up evangelism so you must never put them on equal footing. Nor must you ever confuse the two, they're not the same thing. Nor must you do social action in order to evangelise, because that's corrupt. I must not help you in order to get an opportunity to speak to you. I should help you because you need help, full stop. When people do help in order to gain a gospel opportunity, you undermine your integrity in the giving of help – it's against Matthew 6.

Should Christians give help? Well you can't stop them – can you? I mean, every Christian I know has a conscience and they are very generous – in fact, if you take Christians out of the social welfare agencies of your land you'd be hard pressed to keep them going. Christians always have a soft heart – and of course you should have a soft heart. But it's not the core fundamental business of the church which is preaching the gospel to our congregations and through our congregations to the world. So in this land, persuade the governments and the non Christians to be doing the work of social welfare so that you can get on with the job you need to do. In Tim Keller's area this may be wrong. As I understand it as I've seen it working, at Keller churches they run soup kitchens. Now what's the evangelistic effect of it? It's terrific – as they get non Christians to come down and help with the soup kitchens and they evangelise their

fellow stockbrokers, bankers etc and they've seen a lot of the people from the offices converted but very few people on the other side of the counter....because what they're doing on the other side of the counter is giving them soup. There are a lot of people who need soup in New York, and it's a good thing to do but they're using it evangelistically with their fellow workers – that's a smart move, not a compromise. So you see you can do it, but it needs to be creative.

This whole thing about salt and light – salt of the earth and light of the earth totally misunderstands Matthew 5. Go to the St Andrew's Cathedral website, get my sermon on that – it's just totally wrong. There are 13 uses of salt in the ancient world and 17 in the Bible – why do you think it's preservative? The main way Jesus uses salt in Luke 14 is as fertiliser You are the fertiliser of the land – what on earth did he mean? Not, as all those sermons you and I used to preach in the past about preserving the good of society and be light of the world evangelistically – that's not what that passage is about.

5. Why should we be so focussed on church growth rather than gospel growth when the Bible emphasises the latter? In preaching the gospel and growing churches should we not rely on the gospel and not words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be robbed of its power?

The relationship between church and evangelism is a very complex one to work out, that is, the church really is there for Christians – it's not fundamentally there for evangelism. But part of it being there for Christians is to grow them to be like Christ, which inevitably means they'll be evangelistic. You can't be like Christ and be unconcerned for the lost, that would be ridiculous. So you've got to live your life to Christ, and as they live their life to Christ, so the church must always be open to new people joining it. So there's always an evangelistic element to church but it's not just, "we're running evangelistic services every Sunday" – that's not what churches are about. Church is actually for Christians, but for Christians in such a fashion that they become evangelists and is open evangelistically with the non Christians who come to church.

So you've got to understand what you're doing in church. It's by the gospel people are converted and it's by the gospel that the church will grow and our concern must be for the growth of the gospel in the land. But the gospel will never grow without church because it comes out of Christians growing up in church and it leads to non Christians joining church through being converted. You can't just have spread of the gospel without church, so as Paul goes through Turkey he preaches the gospel and plants churches. You can't just preach the gospel and leave them unfellowshipped. You draw them into fellowship with God and therefore fellowship with other people.

The nature of the word 'church', the ecclesia, means 'gathering', because in the Bible gathering is salvation and dispersing is judgement; Tower of Babel they're dispersed, Mount Sinai they're gathered, and when they go into the land they will continue to be gathered in the land until they sin, and then they are dispersed. But a new day is coming when the dispersal will end and they will be gathered. Church is gathering. So Christianity and preaching the gospel always lead to gatherings. So once you say we're going to be gathered, who's going to put the electricity on, who's going to put up a building, there's a whole range then of natural order things to think about because you're gathered *in this world*. It's not just that we're going to be gathered in heaven, the church is not just the invisible, the church is *visible* and in its visibility we have to work out who's

going to collect the money, who's going to order the books, who's going to build the building.

6. To what extent does church growth depend on the personality of a church leader – scavengers are very different to low key maintainers?

Humanly speaking, yes, church leaders are very important in growing churches. Preaching is a really key thing – by preaching you set the tone of what the whole church life is like. It's very hard to grow churches without clear and forceful preaching; it's a rare thing for a church to grow without a preacher. However, it is not preaching alone because the preacher also has to help with the management of the growth of a business. It's a little business that has a whole range of other things that go along with preaching, but the leader is a key element in churches that grow. This means that Cornhill and college and recruiting and training processes are a very important part of the Gospel Partnership. The two things go together – the self starters and the blokes worth watching – you need both to make the system work which is part of what I'm really excited about with the Gospel Partnerships.

7. A number of us are involved in mid-week ministries – would you apply the same wisdom to these? What do you think the main differences and issues are?

We started a lunchtime ministry since we've been at the Cathedral. But our university ministry was also in a commuter university so most of our ministry was lunchtime ministry. I think lunchtime ministry is terrific and really valuable and important. The weakness of it lies in that you don't have ongoing relationships at the same level or intensity as you do in family ministries in the suburban church. That's the weakness, but the added strength is that you can invite people to lunchtime meetings who you would never get in a suburban church. So it's not an either/or, it's a both/and, and you really need to support whatever lunchtime things there are. There's a group called ECOM in Sydney who have started lunchtime ministries and they've found that something like 40% of the people who come to lunchtime ministries never go to church anywhere else or attend a Roman Catholic church. They've got hundreds coming to different locations, and you've got opportunities there that you'd never get in suburban churches.

8. How important do you think vision from the church leadership to be for the future of the church?

Well I think the important thing is the bible – the bible sets the vision – that's the important vision that needs to be set. That's where you need to get it from. Other visions like 'let's reach the Chinese' - well they're important but subsidiary and trivial.

9. Do all ideas come from the senior pastor in your experience?

No, but it's very difficult to have a senior pastor who's a visionary who also has the grace and humility to listen to his colleague's visions and put them into operation. It can be done, so I hear...there are people who can listen to their colleague's ideas and pick up and run with them – it's just a case of personalities.

10. Something on the homogenous unit principle. Some say monocultural outreach in churches is most effective and multi cultural diversity can wait until

heaven, but does this fall short of the bible's picture of the church – pragmatism trumping principal?

Mono-cultural is the most effective way but that doesn't make it right. You've got to take into account Ephesians 3:10 that the church here on earth is the declaration of the victory of Christ, uniting Jew and Gentile together. So what you've got to do is balance that off with 1 Corinthians 8-10 which acknowledges that when we minister we've got to minister in cultures because cultures are unimportant and we mustn't make culture the be all and end all. So to the Jew I become as a Jew, to a Greek I become as a Greek, but when we do it corporately that is very difficult. You see, I can become as a Greek and arrive an hour and a half late, and I can be like a Chinese person and be on time. But how are we going to run a Greek/Chinese church? That then becomes very difficult. So what you do is say 'we're meeting at 10 o'clock' and you preach one sermon then and then another at 11.30 when the Greeks turn up.

It's nonsense to think that we won't be monocultural in some way or other. We always are. People used to come to our university church in one phase of our development and say that everyone there was between 18 and 30 except Phillip and Helen, so they said this is a homogenous church. However, there were 40 different first languages spoken inside that church. Whereas the church down the road which had babies and grannies, were all Anglo Saxons with only one language spoken in the church. They are every bit as homogenous as our church was and in fact in comparison to Ephesians chapter 3 our church was even more 'uniting Jew and Greek' because we actually had some Jews and some Greeks within the church whereas they only had Anglo Saxons of all ages! So the key is that every congregation must be open to anyone who names the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That seems to me to be the way forward in terms of principal. So when we started the Friday night church for undergraduates, the first person converted in the church was the grandfather of one of the members. We didn't say, 'Well I'm sorry, you're a grandfather, you've got to go somewhere else – grandfathers get converted on Thursday nights, this is a Friday night'. Whoever you are, if you name the name of Jesus you are welcome as a full blown member. Even if you can't speak the Korean language you're still a full blown member if you want to be in this church. But inevitably, if you speak in Korean, you will attract Koreans and not Japanese.

11. What's the difference between a scavenger and an entrepreneur?

Not much – entrepreneur is another word I've thought of using but an entrepreneur generally has at his disposal other people's resources and doesn't know how to steal them and purloin them and manipulate them and use them....a scavenger has that little bit more grunt that is needed. In a sense A is a scavenger, B is an entrepreneur because he now has enough to keep him going, he just has to work out how to reallocate resources to make it work. Whereas A doesn't have enough to do anything but he just knows how to scratch it up from somewhere.

12. One of the issues in this city is Hillsong – friend or foe?

Sorry about that export. If you're not a reader of the Briefing yet, shame on you, the Briefing has a terrific article in the January edition about Hillsong. Tony Payne, the editor, used to be a charismatic himself so he understands the inside working of what it's like to be a charismatic. They went to their big conference and they spent a lot of time

analysing what Hillsong is about. Hillsong is second generational charismatic and it is fulfilling the prophecies that we have said for the last 40 years – we now see it come full circle. That is, when the charismatics commenced they came out of evangelicalism but they carried evangelicalism with them. The charismatics have always been confusing to evangelicals because they say all the right evangelical things but have this other distinctive. But they are never driven by the evangelical things; they are driven by the other distinctive. That's what really drives them. Now you come to the second generation and they don't have the evangelical baggage, they just have the other distinctive, and what the other distinctive is sheer experientialism. But Tony Payne analyses it very carefully – not rudely or superficially like me, but very carefully in that article.

13. How do we protect young people from it do you think?

Well, if you want to divide a church start discussing how they should raise children and disagreeing on the subject of music. They're the two divisive subjects in our community aren't they – and if you want to protect your people, especially the music, you've got a challenge. I think we've done really well in recent times in the production of more evangelical music. But you can't just use charismatic music – if you use charismatic music in your churches you are actually weakening the defences of the people against this kind of movement. So you really have to say 'we want evangelical music here.' And that means we've got to put more pressure on our composers and our writers to produce more so we have good things to sing rather than nonsense things to sing and you've got to teach young people that it's not the quality of the percussion that matters but the intention of the words. It's silly to put your head in the sand and say 'we only sing Wesleyan hymns because that's the only thing we trust'. We live in an age that has moved onto percussive music, it's a different style of music, the music of yesteryear is dead. From our surveys (we do them every 5 years) we thought that people would move out of choruses into hymns as they grew up – what we've discovered is that the age of hymn singers as opposed to chorus singers gets 5 years older every 5 years. In other words, hymn singing is being phased out of our community. If you're an old hymn singer I love you, we'll have a good time in heaven, but give up until then because it's over! The day is gone, because as long as you're hanging onto that you're not doing what you need to do, that is create the right theology in today's music.

14. Some of your guys have written very good music to some of the old hymns.

Yes, some of that's good, that's a good thing that can be done, and you've got one of our best men over here in England for 2 or 3 years up at Oxford, Philip Percival, promoting Emu music, and he's here not only to sell Emu music and the rest but also to start networking with the terrific composers you have over here in England to help us too – we can really help each other across the continents on this one.

15. Are there things that we do in our services week on week that encourage complacency?

Oh absolutely – such as reading the prayer book. If church is the same every week then in our present culture why would you come? As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be exactly the same week after week. Well, frankly there's no point coming. You can do this the prayer book way and you can do it without the prayer book – the same elders preach the same sermons through prayer every Sunday. You've heard those

kinds of prayers haven't you, where they rattle through the same list of bible verses that affected them when they were young and they go through the same 3 minute prayers and it's just as awful as rattling out the prayer book. One of the problems I've found with the prayer book was that the only way I could actually get all the words right was to stop thinking about what I was saying because as soon as I started thinking about what I was saying I stumbled. So I just used to go into automatic pilot. Well, if you're running services on automatic pilot what are you doing? You're running a fiction, in fantasy land. But Australians are happier with 'sloppy' than you are and you do things with polish that we don't and so I'm a little wary about this question.

What we need is reality, that's what we need. People need to come in to the congregation and feel this is real. Now what reality will be is frankly different in different contexts. So we're at a big convention in Katoomba (our Keswick) and we had Dick Lucas speaking to 5000 people in a tent in the height of summer. The kids were all the in their shorts and flip flops and T shirts and Dick.....stood in his trousers and shirt and cardigan and they loved it, they really loved him. If he'd been there in shorts and a T-shirt they would have thought 'phoney', but because he was standing there in a cardigan they said 'what can you teach us' and they lapped it up because he was real. So that's what counts. What is real? Well real is real, and that's what church must be. If it's slick it's not real in Australia but it can be in England because I think you are slick in England compared to us.

16. Given the need for evangelistic flexibility, being biblical without selling out to culture, what do you think about seeker friendly ways of doing church?

It's back to front. You can't ask the non Christian 'what does he want in church' and then create a church for him – it's daft. Because when will you hear him saying 'I want more sermons about hell, I *really* want to hear about judgement, I'm just dying to hear.....'? He's never going to tell you what he needs to hear, just what he wants to hear. So to draw up your agenda on the basis of what the non Christian wants to hear is to sell out to the world totally. It's a stupid, daft idea.

17. How should staff teams function to ensure a church continues on the B direction.

Staff teams can have all kinds of problems. When a staff team grows to a certain size – what then is the role of the church committee or the eldership or whatever, because the staff team is meeting every day whereas the church committee is meeting once a month, so a growing staff team means a reallocation of activities for church committees, and that's quite a problem.

It's really important in a staff team to develop total and absolute commitment to each other – it's better not to have someone than have someone who is half heartedly with you or mainly with you – you have to be absolutely committed to each other and to each other personally as well as theologically to love the other person because the unity and love within the church is created by the unity and love within the staff team. If there's a split in the staff team, the church will feel it – they won't know it but they'll feel it. If the staff think each other are just wonderful, the church will stay united. Whenever we appointed staff members we got the wives to say if they were happy with the new wife that was coming because a fight between two staff wives, well the church is going to be

split over that. So we screened wives, or got wives to screen wives to make sure the wives were able to work and live harmoniously together in fellowship with each other.

It's very important to have diversity within the staff so you mustn't appoint staff members who are just like you – they've got to be just like you in passion for the gospel but they've got to have the differences and so I've always had the terrific pleasure and privilege of working with terrific women, in the staff team. I always appoint women on the staff team as they do a whole range of ministries I couldn't possibly do and are terrific team blenders – it's generally the women within the staff team who work to hold the team together. You can imagine the tensions that arise in a group of young bucks, it can be a tough staff team, but the women staff members, they're the ones who hold together these young bucks and who can give the feedback and the information to hold the team together. Staff development's a big subject but an important one to work on as you grow a B church.