**Organic Evangelism: how do we serve our communities and share our faith?**

As Dennis Pethers stood up to talk I will admit I was a little nervous and perhaps just a bit defensive. Dennis is an 'Evangelist' from the UK and not surprisingly he was here to tell us about evangelism. "Prepare to feel guilty" I thought to myself. Don't tell anybody, but I hate evangelism. Having grown up in the church I have come across my fair share of teaching on, practice of, failure at, and guilt about evangelism and as I sat back, I braced myself for more of the same.

Yet as this quiet unassuming man began to speak I heard something quite different. Dennis' message is one of compassion. He is well aware that for too long we have had a very limited picture of evangelism; something confident, articulate preacher types, who don’t seem to care what people think of them, like to do. And when you hold that picture up against your own life the contrast is often immense. At that point you feel pressured to choose; become something you're not, or give up on it completely. Usually after a couple of tries at the first option with hideously embarrassing results you decide obviously you don’t have that gift and with a huge sigh of relief, quickly take up the second option.

While acknowledging that some people do have a gift of evangelism, Dennis firmly believes that all believers are called to share the message of Christ and to do that first we need to shift the way we relate to people.

We need to learn to **look** and try to see people as Jesus sees them. When we have been at this faith thing for a while, often we don’t see the people around us anymore; they are just there. We must reconnect with people and that process starts with noticing them.

Really **listening** to people allows us to match what they said they need with what we offer them. We are able to meet them where they are, not just where we would like them to be. Listen to what they are saying and then pour the love of Jesus into that situation.

As you get to know people and listen to their stories then you will be able to **love** them. When we stop focussing on what we are trying to achieve and actually really love people then we share with them a very powerful demonstration of our faith.

We must remember that we are working with God not for Him. God is already working in these people’s lives. When an opportunity presents itself **trust** God that he’s in it and it will be OK. This is not about boldness, that’s about us, it’s about learning to trust God when we face the choice “do I pick up this conversation or not”.

‘Preach the gospel and when appropriate use words’ to modify a well-known saying. It is not enough to just act out our faith we should also be able to articulate it. Trust God and be willing to **tell** the truth about our faith.

Dennis challenged us to make talking about what God is doing in our life right now, normal. "Share life with people and don't leave out the faith part". So just what does that mean?

It means being willing to share our lives as they happen, the good the bad and at times the ugly. Don't just gloss over the difficulties and don't only share the success stories, tell the truth. How does the faith I have in God make things different, whether the situations I am facing are good or bad.

It means we need to practice, get used to, normalise talking about our faith journey, with each other and with the people we share our lives with.

It means that although we don’t have to have all the answers we do need to put some thought into communicating our faith. The words we say do matter. Learn how to talk about your faith. Learn how to discuss questions you struggle with. Learn how to help people find their own answers.

It means being willing to support and encourage each other as we share our lives and faith with people.

Dennis offered a new way of thinking about evangelism. He told us to value the process of evangelism not just the end result. We need to value the opportunity to walk alongside people as God reveals himself to them. Evangelism is leaving the person I have met with a better understanding of God than they would have had if they had never met me. Not that complicated really. Who would have thought an evangelist could make me feel something other than blind terror and shame! Thanks Dennis, Crossover, and BUV; you have made me realise that I can do this evangelism stuff, in fact I already am.

Rev Dennis Pethers is founder of Viz-A-Viz Ministries and International Director of More to Life. Since coming to know Jesus, Dennis has travelled extensively across the UK and around the world telling people about Jesus and equipping churches and Christians to engage in effective evangelism. Dennis is an author and creator of numerous creative resources that are being been used by churches to help people discover the truth about Jesus. Find out more at [www.dennispethers.com](https://mail.buv.com.au/owa/redir.aspx?C=6f266037e71b4633ad6e1b3d43f01af1&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.dennispethers.com" \t "_blank) or [www.vizaviz.org/therooftop](https://mail.buv.com.au/owa/redir.aspx?C=6f266037e71b4633ad6e1b3d43f01af1&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.vizaviz.org%2ftherooftop" \t "_blank)

Dennis spoke at Balwyn Baptist Church as part of a BUV/Crossover initiative.

Stacey Wilson is an Occupational Therapist, student, mother of three and research assistant for Darren Cronshaw. She is currently consulting with the BUV Mission Catalyst Team.

Dennis returns to Australia in 2014. Look out for further details and see his website and the latest “The Rooftop Initiative” <http://www.dennispethers.com/the-rooftop>