

CROSSLINK CHRISTIAN NETWORK

*The time has come,
the kingdom of God is at hand,
repent and believe the good news.
Jesus Christ
[Mark 1]*

CROSSLINK IS A NETWORK BUILT ON KINGDOM OF GOD VALUES

Crosslink Christian Network was established in 1997 to support congregations and ministry organizations in Australia who were developing new priorities and vision born largely from the revelation and experience during and following the Charismatic Renewal. We began to look to the Bible and the Holy Spirit to discover the most useful ways of providing support and encouragement to Christian leaders. That led us to a new understanding of the Kingdom of God message of Jesus.

Our experience in Crosslink reflects a number of these. Here are some of them:

1. Grateful for the Past but Shaped by the Future



Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not

consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus

Philippians 3

Most of the people who seek out a Network like Crosslink have re-discovered Biblical truth that has impacted the way they live and the way they want to serve Jesus. It is likely that part of that is associated with what God was doing through the Charismatic Movement and its antecedents. These differences will often have created some kind of tension between their track and that of their denomination or movement.

Commonly this shift turned their focus and identity from something that happened in the past to an embrace of things they were seeking even if those things have not yet been fulfilled. In my own case a Christian leader from the UK spoke prophetically to me, saying that God wanted us to join ourselves to *"tomorrow's bride, not yesterday's widow."* Often movements form the opposite way. People encounter God in some powerful way and then begin to live out the implications of that experience. They often form doctrinal systems around it and may also lock in to a particular kind of spiritual culture. Over time and without ongoing encounters, that powerful experience becomes institutionalized and can even take on a status that could be described as idolatrous. Sometimes the life of a movement just dies and no one knows what to do about it except to protect and defend it as if its memory had some intrinsic value. I think those

discoveries and encounters were waypoints on bigger journey but they were treated as destinations.

Most people belong to Crosslink because of what they are seeking after rather than where they've come from. I don't know any Crosslink member who is not grateful for their past and the many things of value they have received and experienced. It's just that we are not being shaped by what is past. Many of us have made costly and/or controversial decisions. Generally they have been made carefully, prayerfully and wisely. But often those very decisions brought misunderstanding and misrepresentation from others. We didn't hate anyone; we just wanted to take a different road.

This is an important distinction and one that will continue to provide challenges and bring further changes. As such, we have nothing to defend and nothing to protect. We just have some things that we want to go after. Hopefully we will be shaped by the "end game" rather than trying to build a village at a waypoint. One of the things we find ourselves doing in this process is getting a better idea of what the "end game" looks like. As we discover this, so our lives, priorities and therefore our journey continues to be shaped.

2. Building a Roadway a Car Park:



*“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.
Matthew 7*

When the number of Affiliated churches and groups began to increase, God helped us by speaking prophetically to the leaders, telling us that he had called us into being to “build a roadway, not a car park.” It was amazing how aptly the “car park” picture fitted what we had become at that point. Crosslink was very much like a car park. Most of us had strong convictions about unity and didn't like the idea of being independent. But we also wanted to fulfill a sense of calling that didn't fit either the institutional or franchising models. So most of us were “parked” in the comparatively safe minimalistic structure that the Network provided at the time. Just prior to that prophetic word being spoken by one of our leaders I had been made aware that Crosslink was about

“Call Not Convenience” and had been thinking and praying about what the “calling” could be about.

It wasn't as simple to identify the “roadway”. My own response was to spend an extended period of time seeking the Lord. I found myself asking God what were the things that he had called into being but were still lacking completion. As I gave myself to reading through the Bible in a number of broad sweeps I discovered that there were at least four things that had never been accomplished by any generation of the church in any place that I knew of: the first was the fulfillment of the great commission [Mark 16:15], the second was holiness [1 Peter 1:16], the third was oneness [John 17:21] and the fourth was fullness [Ephesians 4:13]. The task of embracing these values was a little tricky. There was some friction as we tried to figure out exactly what this kind of roadway looked like. But the same process did create a much more dynamic character to what we were trying to do. All of these were consistent with what I would describe as “kingdom values.” God was calling us to pioneer a pathway that would see the church represent Jesus and the kingdom, rather than a particular theological system, doctrine or experience.

I am convinced that this “roadway” will give our communities a better opportunity to see a Jesus-looking God through the window of a Jesus-looking church doing Jesus-looking ministry. I think most of us assumed that “roadway” referred to three-lane superhighway. I no longer think that way. I think it may well be a narrow gate leading to an overgrown and winding track.

3. A Kingdom Family of Supernatural Connections



“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3

God is a set of relationships:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Everything that God is and everything he intends flows out from these relationships operating in oneness. Sadly most human cultures have abandoned this divine pattern. We have put a value on all kinds of distinctions so that some are higher and lower and others are either in or out. What we have determined to do in this Network is to give a primacy to relationship, equality and unity. It is the currency we use to do everything we need to do. It takes longer, costs more and complicates things, but we are committed to discovering how far we can go along this track. We genuinely want to recognize, celebrate and pursue all of the gifts and anointings that make the presence of Jesus tangible and accessible. What we want to do is to exalt Jesus, not the gift or the person carrying the gift.

What makes this possible is described by Paul in Philippians 2.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

There is so much arrogance and so much prideful competitiveness around the body of Christ. So many good followers of Jesus live out their lives through the vicarious exploits of a follower of Jesus who is considered to be successful. It is ugly and godless no matter how successful or how gifted. The problem is that most of us don't realize we are doing it. In the past we have generally accumulated our lists of offenders and drawn lines to support our supposed greater godliness. But there is another way. We can build a Network around a commitment to Jesus rather than the imputed importance of an individual or group of individuals. We are earnestly seeking to live out this verse in every way we can as much as we can. We have accepted the challenge to treat leaders of the smallest churches with the same honour as we would leaders of large churches. The same goes for the other reasons we have produced some form of human hierarchy. Please understand that this is not a plea for some latent form of anarchy, nor is it to denigrate the idea of leadership. We need godly structures and good and godly leaders. What I am talking about is a set of attitudes and the way they qualify relationships.

The very name we chose for the Network turned out to be significant, even though at the beginning it didn't seem all that impressive. The word “crosslink” comes from industrial chemistry and is a term that describes a bond that links two polymer chains together. Probably the simplest way to describe it is to say that it is what makes synthetic rubber tyres both flexible and strong. That's how we seek to develop relationships. We have always tried to provide help and resolve issues in a way that was flexible enough to allow important movement but strong enough to stay connected.

4. Developing Effective Apostolic Connections



*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Ephesians 4*

While we have not been as swift as some in presuming a firm and final definition of what apostolic function is we are certainly committed to a journey that seeks to value all five of the equipping ministries spoken about in Ephesians 4. What we continue to

seek is a practical everyday working model that sees churches full of 'saints' equipped and doing the ministry of Jesus. We have sought to establish what we currently refer to as an 'apostolic structure.'

I think the best working definition of what constitutes an "apostolic connection" would be to ask yourself who has God used to bring fresh Biblical revelation or insight that has enabled you to become a more effective servant of Jesus? That person would qualify as being 'apostolic' to you. There are obviously different ways in which this happens. As far as Crosslink Affiliated Churches and Endorsed Ministers are concerned we are talking about an ongoing mutual relationship commitment, not just reading someone's book or listening to his or her audio file. Another metaphor that illustrates this would be to think of this person as being a "coach." They enable you to do better at what God has called you to do.

It is our strong conviction that for a ministry to increase in health and strength there needs to be strong team relationships within a circle defined by the leadership and community of your own congregation, but also from certain people who visit that circle and who are well known in that circle. They may have no legal authority, but have recognized spiritual authority. They are appointed because people get equipped and do the work of the ministry, not because they are nice people or make people feel good.

If such people are connected to individual leaders and congregations by mutual agreement and if they bring the equipping and encouragement that enables saints to become better ministers then they will also be the best ones to provide wise counsel when there are problems. These people do not need to belong to Crosslink; they just need to be active valued mutual relationships.

Choosing, inviting and appointing these people is an important process but we believe it is one of the most important issues that will ultimately determine whether a church is going to be effective or not over the long term.

During the period of our existence so far this is one characteristic that has gained value rather than diminished. You can appreciate why it is easy for Crosslink leaders and congregations to become isolated islands. When that happens trouble is usually not far behind. It is not only the ministry that is destroyed but a lot of good people get betrayed and hurt. Where these kinds of relationships are strong and open there is always health and growth.

5. A Tool not a Badge



So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow

First Corinthians 1

Crosslink is a tool. No tool has any honour because it looks good hanging on a wall or wrapped in its delivery carton. It is measured by how well it does a job. I happen to be a

person who likes using tools. When we built our current house, completing the shed was almost as important as the house. I am always looking for better tools and have even invented jobs simply to justify getting a new or better tool. I have never mourned the passing of a former tool in favour of a better one.

Badges are different. Badges become the way we distinguish ourselves from others. We can tell who is with us and who is not. We can tell who is 'in' and who is 'out.' Worse still, we can tell whom we like and whom we don't like or who is better and who is worse. Unlike a tool, a badge doesn't do anything nor does it enable anything. Unlike a tool a badge doesn't require you to do anything or produce anything. Over the years Christian groups have attacked, defended, hated, hurt, killed and persecuted based on their badge. Badges make it easier for that to happen.

I believe God has Crosslink is a tool of the kingdom of God message and ministry that God is bringing to the hearts of his people at this time. It has been a tool from the beginning. We had all left our former denominational groups not because we hated anyone, or because we thought we were better than anyone. We were simply looking to get on with the work of the kingdom by living out of the revelation we had embraced. It is as we have continued to follow that track that we have gained a greater understanding of what the Lord had in mind. The result has been a structure that uses kingdom relationships to add value to kingdom ministry.

For Crosslink to remain a worthy tool it must continue to be re-invented. Think about it as a software program. I notice that the operating system on this laptop of mine says I am using Version 10.10.4. Now the first OS X program was released in 2001. It was Version 10.0 and was nicknamed "Cheetah." During the last fourteen years there have been ten new versions, with various sub-versions within those. No one questions the integrity of this. The fact is that if they were still offering 10.0 no one would buy it. What 10.4 tells us is that they have discovered new things and incorporated what they have discovered to make the program more useful. Before you tell me that Christianity is founded on unchanging truth I need to remind you that it only works because people keep on discovering how Jesus, the King wants to extend his Kingdom in their circumstances and within their generation. It is hugely helpful to look at what other generations have discovered, but all of that just makes Jesus own words come freshly to their own hearts, "The time has come, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the gospel."¹

I think Crosslink will only have a future if we embrace everything that remains to be completed and gear up for it. That's a much harder job than simply inventing a tool and then trying to stop our 'market competitors' from invent a better one. I think we have been able to keep doing that for the eighteen years or so that we have existed. I think the key factors are these: Jesus centred, Biblically based, Kingdom focused and Holy Spirit driven. The re-inventing I am talking about is not like subscribing to some kind of spiritual 'Vogue Magazine' to keep up with the latest spiritual fashion. It is to keep discovering what makes us look and sound more like Jesus, what advances the kingdom of God in our communities and what evidences Holy Spirit gifts and fruit. All of this will need to be done through relationships that reflect godly oneness. We don't have to do it the same way or simply copy someone else. Crosslink needs to remain a symbol of encouragement to hear from God and obey what he has said.

¹ Mark 1:15

I remain convinced that the end game is the answer to the question, "If the kingdom of God fully came to this situation what would it look like?" The gospel of the kingdom is the message and the kingdom of God is the product of that message. My way of describing that further is to ask the three questions I think the Bible asks of every generation of God's people: Are we fulfilling our calling to bear God's image, carry his presence and fulfill his purpose in our generation?

6. An Advancing Kingdom not a bunch of Tribes



*He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the **kingdom of God**. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the **kingdom to Israel?**" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in*

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
Acts 1

Tribalism is rampant and ramping upeverywhere. It is a tool used by the enemy to accomplish identity theft. It happens when a sense of belonging is built around something other than our oneness in Christ. Normally that tribal belonging will assume some form of false hierarchy – us and them with the assumption that ‘we’ are better than ‘them.’ It seems that we have almost perfected it in the church and we do it to the detriment of the ministry of Christ. By definition a tribal attitude will focus much more on internal issues than external ones, even if we are involved in work that claims to be for the benefit of people who do not belong.

The same thing happens in just about every church congregation where a little clique is formed so that congregational ‘life’ is defined almost entirely by the interactions within that group. The best way to describe it is to see it working in say, a football club. I follow the Canberra Raiders in the National Rugby League (and the Swans in the AFL). I wear the jumper with the badge. I can sing the club song. The important thing is to make sure everything is geared to show who is for us and who isn't. I know instinctively who is more worthy, who is right when the referee is making a decision and who should win. I immediately feel a bond with every person who is wearing a green piece of clothing and I feel a similarly strong instinctive separation from people who wear colours that belong to the other team. At least at a footy game its all-obvious, out in the open and held up as a virtue. It's the same with political parties. They are tribal through and through.

Although tribal culture pervades many expressions of Christian ministry it is can be more subtle despite being just as instinctive. Our badges are less visible, but we wear them just the same. Our cultures are just as obvious. In my city of Canberra we offer the people a few hundred different versions of heaven every Sunday morning.² I am not suggesting that multiplicity of meetings is the issue. The arrogance, intransigence, fear and defensiveness are the issues. What loses every time is the advance of the kingdom of God. We have been consistently losing ground for as long as I have been a believer, but we are still more likely to act tribally than kingdom-ly on most days of most weeks.

Part of the Crosslink journey and mandate is to bear testimony to a different kind of belonging. This discovery that is being made around the world is born from a fundamental shift of belonging from the tribe to the kingdom. Our various tribal identities are nothing more than a nametag on our jacket. We are following Jesus and want to see the kingdom of God come. The kingdom of God is not something we can possess, control, protect or defend. All we can do is discover it, and when we discover it we can serve it and proclaim it. It is revelation comes much more quietly than many experiences of being born again or filled with the Spirit. Like the parables and teaching of Jesus tell us, the kingdom of God by nature starts small and often unseen – like yeast in flour or a seed in the ground. It is only when this process has had its way that change begins to become obvious.

We still have tags and we work out of buildings. They are tools that serve the larger Cause. It is a matter of identity but not significance. We are kingdom people and can work just as easily with anyone who acknowledges the same King and seeks to advance the same Kingdom. We give expression to it but we don't define it. We serve it but we don't own it. It has to do with our effectiveness outside of our buildings not just inside them. That's what happens to people who are discovering the kingdom message. Just think what happens when the PRIMARY belonging is to the KINGDOM. It signals the end of churches built around boutique theological products. It signals the end of single-ethnic congregations as it does to homogenous demographics. It simple defines us by whether we are following and obeying Jesus. It also sounds the death knell to the exclusive clubs that we have created as we discover that kingdom people are at their best only when they are salt influencing a plate of food or light shining in a dark place. This primary belonging is profoundly counter-cultural and will expose and draw flack from the many ways in which the traditional churches have compromised with their contemporary cultures. It will bear the same features as the ministry of Jesus and the early church in its own day. Hopefully we can be as effective as they were. My point here is that this counter-cultural lifestyle will become more and more our IDENTITY and belonging more than the name of our particular church or ministry group.

CONCLUSION

The message of the kingdom is all about the end game. The litany of Christian movements repeats a story of people who started out by following God and with a work that was supernatural but ending up with a work that was produced and often controlled and defended by human ability. The message of Jesus to the seven churches

² At last count there were at least two hundred and fifty different Christian congregations in the Canberra region.

of Asia³ profoundly pre-empts this. In the case of each church, the transforming power of God that saw the cities impacted and often transformed by God quickly became products of the remnant of God's power compromised by imbibing the 'spirit of the city.' As I said, history tells that tale again and again.

God has not charged Crosslink with the task of becoming the perfect movement. He has called us to give expression to the irrepressible message of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom that glorifies and depends on the rule of God, not the preferences of a particular group of people. The values that I have outlined here are samples of the discoveries we have made to this point. I expect that in another ten years we will have different stories to tell. I am hopeful that they will all speak of the fact that we have made more discoveries. I hope they will tell the story of God advancing HIS kingdom and multiplying seed that has been sown with passion, conviction and love. I hope it will comprise a list of names too long to include and too many to even know. It is my own deepest passion that we have stumbled onto some very pricey "pearls." We just have to figure out whether we are willing to keep paying the price. This is a radical, counter-cultural, messy kingdom we have become a part of. And in terms of western churches like we have in Australia, it's going to get a lot more radical, a lot more counter-cultural and a lot messier. It's just going to be massively fruitful as we keep sowing abundant measures of seed.

³ Revelation 2,3