



Apostolic centres: engines or elephants?

There has been quite a lot of talk in recent years about 'Apostolic Centres', but what does it all mean? A monastery-like building? A bunch of 'Ephesians 4' leaders? Any well-meaning church?

Newfrontiers' church-planter Colin Baron provoked us that our 'resource churches' should be *engines for mission, not hungry elephants* eating up all the resource. So, we asked Mark Mumford (Derby, UK) to talk to us about what makes an Apostolic Centre.

There has been quite a lot of talk in recent years about Apostolic Centres – so what are they?

We know that an Apostolic Centre is definitely not a building or necessarily a big church. In its simplest terms, it is a **'giving, sending, releasing and resourcing Church'**. It will inevitably be a church that has an influence wider than itself and **mission** at its core!

We can look at the New Testament and see that there are different types of churches that could all be described as Apostolic Centres. Jerusalem and Antioch were very different,

so were Ephesus, Corinth, Rome and Philippi. Each one of these appears to be of strategic importance, with an influence on its surrounding region, and beyond. Antioch is the first and clearest example of a church sending ministries out for mission, as recorded in Acts 13.

So what are some of the characteristics of an Apostolic Centre today? I would suggest that these are some of the qualities:

- a) it will be strong, influential and growing
- b) it will be relevant to and make an impact on contemporary culture

- c) it will be a base for Ephesians 4 ministries
- d) it will have a strong focus on training and preparation
- e) it will be 'mission-shaped'
- f) it will be intentionally sending people as pioneers to plant or initiate new churches
- g) it will target its resources (especially finance) to support mission, particularly to those it has sent out
- h) it will always be dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit

So, it must be a 'working model' (i.e. it will have the qualities that we would want to see

reproduced). However, this does not mean that it is the 'finished article', but rather a community of believers carrying the values that lead to expansion and development.

Three levels

Having considered this for a few years, we have come to the conclusion that an Apostolic Centre should function at 3 levels:

1. Making a difference

An influential church should be making an impact on



its own local community. Many churches today are responding to the challenge to be more connected and involved in their local communities, serving them and working for their good.

Social engagement is vital, in particular, as we have a responsibility to the poor and the marginalised. However, there is a broader agenda as the church should also be actively equipping and supporting believers in their workplace, especially where they are involved in places of influence such as local government, education, health, legal services, etc.

It cannot be acceptable that our churches are primarily focused around our own meetings with our local communities unaware that we even exist!

2. Reaching a region

An Apostolic Centre will have a burden to reach out into its surrounding region.

Many larger churches today can build up a reputation for 'gathering in' (i.e. people can drive miles to go to church meetings, whilst neglecting their own community!). To carry an area identity would seem to be quite biblical ('to the church in Corinth together with all the saints throughout Achaia' 2 Cor 1 v 1), so the aim should be to plant out into the region, rather than gather in from it!

Each community is different. Villages are culturally different from towns and towns from

cities. Each one will need relevant, 'incarnational' communities of believers with a strong concern to being carriers of good news to their locality. The Apostolic Centre would then support and resource these 'new missional communities' as they seek to become established.

3. A heart for the nations

Finally I would suggest that all Apostolic Centres should have the nations in their hearts as well as a burden for their own immediate localities. The Great Commission states "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (peoples)..! An international vision, and a heart to see the gospel of the Kingdom preached in every people group will be central to an Apostolic Centre, as it gives, sends and releases people and resources into the global harvest field.

Regular short-term teams overseas, supporting and

encouraging believers in other nations, are always beneficial. However, the preparation and sending of people (missionaries) on a longer term basis is ultimately more fruitful... and more costly! But we also have an extra element these days. Many of us live in multi-cultural communities and we have the opportunity to reach out to other nations on our own doorstep! This should produce a richness of diversity of culture in the church and an awareness of the challenge of embracing other cultures in our everyday life.

The test

Ultimately the test of whether a church is Apostolic or not will be defined by its giving, sending and releasing of people and resources. Each Apostolic Centre will have a passion to reach out to lost people in the three areas listed above.

These could be summed up in the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (*Making a difference*) and in all Judea and Samaria (*Reaching a region*) and to the ends of the earth (*A heart for nations*)" (brackets mine!) ... Let's have more of them!



Mark Mumford is part of the European team of Salt and Light Ministries, and leads Community Church Derby, UK.

Remember: be friends!

Don't forget: most people...

- come to faith in Christ through relationship with a group of Christians;
- become Christians gradually, over a period of time – 'Damascus road' conversions are quite rare;
- find entry into church life reasonably easy – if they come with a friend;

Finding Faith Today,
John Finney

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Norman Burnett, SE Kent's evangelism coordinator: "...a high quality event in a non-threatening environment providing an excellent opportunity to share the gospel and reveal an aspect of the Church most people never knew existed."

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Contact Gary on
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Middle East training?

Mission training opportunity in the Middle East! Autumn 2005. This valuable opportunity could be right for some, who may not yet fully understand their call or be fully trained in terms of having passed through a pre-field training programme.

Will include: Arabic; input for ministry in the Middle East; prayer, intercession/worship; time to consider personal call; friendship building with Arab Christians and Muslims; exploration in small teams; prayerwalking and evangelism.

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