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[Here are notes taken during this presentation. If there are any inaccuracies, please let me know, and they will be corrected.]

Two experiences compared: The Music Store & and his previous parish

- In many ways the experience managing a music store facing financial problems highlights similarities in managing a church.
- Working hard and not seeing results; some relief and extra time gained by using the internet, and Amazon sales; vinyl records are making a comeback; CDs have become an area of interest recently; Downtown services started to attract members to BCP services.
- Relationships started to grow.

Observation: It was felt that God was at work.

- The parish church had problems of a similar nature to the Music store.
- The congregation was revitalized when the late-train service brought into operation; Nigerian community enlivened the congregation; A church in Waterloo closed and its members joined the congregation.

Observation: You cannot force evangelism, but you can be open to your neighbours in love and kindness, and this seems to be a good starting point.

Insights from Author David Fitch: Faithful Presence

- David Fitch uses three 'pictures' or diagrams to describe parish congregations and the way they view their church for the sake of comparison. Each picture below represents a distinct approach to 'church'.
- The question asked of the following options is - Which will work the best for us?

<p>1 A large, closed circle containing images of chalice, bread</p>	<p>Traditional church, established, closed and inward looking; church buildings which guard power and influence</p>
<p>2 A porous circle (dotted line) containing an image of a house</p>	<p>Good host to neighbours, house/home churches, Bible study, flexible</p>
<p>3 A half circle not quite containing image of city skyscrapers, apartment blocks, with tiny people at ground level</p>	<p>Church is not a building; Christian people being sent out among people, often into a potentially inhospitable environment like the city square; a church congregation which often faces exhaustion, depletion, not building congregation directly, and often without power and influence.</p>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reference

- Matt, explored a reference made by Bonhoeffer of where Christ on the Cross was seen, at his time of writing, as representing the presence of God but also where He was viewed as being placed there powerless. The image can be considered in contemporary society's terms as confirming Christ's weakness where the Church is not trusted and where, in general, natural credibility in it has been eroded.
- However, Bonhoeffer **suggests an alternative view** in which Christ's vulnerability gives us a clue to moving forward to finding relevance, trust and purpose. This vulnerability, for him is a key to understanding how we should move forward.

Daniel Berrigan & William Stringfellow (pacifists, anti-war activists)

- A reading from Stringfellow's book (1964) was shared. I hope this paraphrase captures the gist:
- If I were a bishop I would not consecrate buildings but rather focus on depth of passion and involvement, then there can be a deployment of resources. I would walk the city streets, first hear the city, then scout the land to find 500 Christians and live on whatever means of survival is possible. Then, too, go and knock on every door, but then not as the missionary, but rather I would say – 'we care for you as God cares for you'. That's all, and there would be no expectations, but just the announcement.

Observations:

- Ordinarily, the message would be met with suspicion because of the pervasive suspicion and guile in the world. The importance lies firstly in being out in the city.
- Second, dispel distrust, by not loading the interaction with expectations. There are echoes of similarities with the Disciples as they began to reach out and spread the gospel.
- You can never listen and learn enough from your community. It is essential to get a sense of what peoples' needs are first. Spend time where the people are and with the people first.
- A church that is fighting for the survival of its current structures, buildings is of no consequence, rather it must start anew and not close the circle (the first picture mentioned earlier) and formulate new responses for its current community.
- The three 'pictures' are not intended to point criticism or judgment, but rather to clarify the options that lie ahead. Each has its own merits, but also consequences. The images are intended to promote discussion in finding solutions.

Books referred to and recommended

1. David Fitch: *Faithful Presence 2016*
2. Richard Carter: *The City is my Monastery, A contemporary rule of life 2021*
3. Graham Cray: *On Mission with Jesus: Changing the Default Setting of the Church 2024*