

Pastor to Pastor

ROADS - a concept for effective church life

So many people have produced books and systems about the dynamics of creating and sustaining a healthy church. One of the best I have encountered is *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwarz. However, to get the full benefit of his ideas a church needs to undertake the survey and have the NCD people process and analyse the results. I would like to propose something simpler.

Many years ago the Holy Spirit led me into an appreciation of the key dynamics of church life that has served my local church well for more than two decades. I call the concept ROADS – Relationship, Outreach, Anointing, Doctrine, and Structure.

How the five dynamics relate to one another

Before I develop each of these dynamics, I need to comment on how they relate to each other as parts of a whole. All five dynamics need to be equally strong driving forces that energize the local church. If a church has great relationships both with God and its members, but gives little attention to outreach, then it will inevitably implode into a holy huddle. If it functions gloriously in the gifts and anointing of the Holy Spirit, but is light on sound doctrine, then it will most likely fly off into some form of charisma. If it gives much attention to doctrine, but little energy to anointing, then it will probably calcify into some form of religious legalism. Even if a local church is strong on relationships, outreach, anointing, and sound doctrine, yet lacks biblical church structure, it is unlikely to be able to sustain itself over time or to reproduce itself in kind. All five dynamics are needed in equal measure for a church to be healthy and effective.

What each dynamic encompasses

The **Relationship** dynamic encompasses both vertical and horizontal aspects. Vertically, the church body needs to relate to God in worship, prayer and fellowship. Horizontally, the members need to relate to each other in participative love, acceptance, and forgiveness. **Outreach** includes evangelism, social service and facilitating economic development but is more a life-orientation than a set of activities. **Anointing** is a word I have chosen to describe a church's dependence on the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. **Doctrine** is more than simply sound biblical teaching. It also focuses on a Christ-centred appreciation of the scriptures. **Structure** has to do with the way the church is governed and formed in its various expressions.

How to use ROADS

The idea is not to try to arrange the local church around these five dynamics. For instance, one cannot allocate a leader to look after 'anointing' and another to oversee 'relationship'. ROADS describes dynamics and not areas of operation. By the same token it is virtually impossible to develop a strategic plan around ROADS. However, it is invaluable as a leadership tool. For instance, every year my Eldership team evaluates each of the five dynamics by asking questions such as, "How much time, church talent, and physical resources do we 'spend' on each of these dynamics?" and "Does our annual budget reflect an equal resourcing of these five dynamics?" Other questions would be, "In a typical month, to what extent are each of these dynamics expressed in and through the church?" and "Do our Sunday services reflect an equal emphasis on all these dynamics?"

As a local church we have used ROADS to form the framework of our statement of Vision and Values, which reads as follows:

Relationship *We are a church family in relationship with God and each other within an environment of order, participation and accountability. We value and seek to practice love and acceptance and see our church as a 'city of refuge'. We are principle, value and relationship based rather than rules or results based. Ministries are motivated from within rather than imposed from without; the leaderships' role is seen as serving, equipping and facilitating rather than initiating programmes.*

Outreach *We seek to reach out to others, both corporately and individually, outside of the congregational setting, to bring them into relationship with Jesus Christ, to teach them the basic principles of His kingdom, and to then release them to go and do likewise for others. We have positioned ourselves within the context of local community and seek to serve our community both practically and spiritually.*

Anointing *We embrace the person of the Holy Spirit and depend on his anointing for life and ministry whilst eschewing manipulative or psychic methods and practices.*

Doctrine *We hold to and seek to teach sound, biblical, life-giving doctrine based on the scriptural revelation of what Jesus said and did, and to propagate this doctrine through local churches. Our emphasis is on expository preaching with application and systematic teaching of the Bible.*

Structure *We aim to extend the kingdom of God by establishing interdependent, autonomous local churches founded on the principles presented in the book of Acts and embodied in the ROADS concept. We believe that the relational dynamics we value can only be evidenced*

satisfactorily within a small congregational setting. Our model for church life and functionality is organic rather than institutional – Christ Jesus is the effective head of the church and the Holy Spirit motivates and empowers ministries in and through the body of people constituting the local church. Our leadership is by means of a functional plurality of Elders where each plays a role and makes a contribution vital to the effectiveness of the whole. Their ministry as well as decision-making is both shared and joint.

ROADS in the book of Acts

I believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and so I was not happy to embrace the concept of ROADS unless I could identify it within the life of the early church. The first place I looked for it was in the book of Acts, and I found it in chapter 2 verses 42 to 47 which read: *'They devoted themselves to ④ the apostles' teaching and ① to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ③ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ① All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⑤ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ① ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. ② And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

① RELATIONSHIPS = ... to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ... ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. ...

② OUTREACH = ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

③ ANOINTING = ... Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ...

④ DOCTRINE = ... the apostles' teaching ...

⑤ STRUCTURE = ... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes ...

As you can see, the earliest account of the functioning church contains the five dynamics described in the acrostic ROADS. I agree with those who say that we should not attempt to slavishly reproduce biblical church models. What they usually mean is that standard 'templates' may not adequately serve a church functioning in a very different age, culture, and geographic setting. I am not suggesting that we attempt to transport the form of the essentially Jewish early church and apply it to our time and culture. However, I do believe

that we should transport and apply the principles of biblical church life presented in scripture. ROADS describes timeless scriptural principles, not a church template.

Conclusion

There is no magic *muti* for a healthy local church. Church life is complex and organic rather than organisational. However, because it is a body and not a building, an organism rather than an enterprise, it does function through the interaction of dynamic forces. ROADS is how I understand these dynamics, and how I believe they should equally operate to grow and sustain a healthy and effective local church.

I hope this article has stimulated you to think about how your local church functions, and I would love to interact with you if you have any comments or observations.