

## HOSPITALITY RENEWED - A VISION FOR INTENTIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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Australians on Britain's Canterbury trail often visit monasteries, many of which are little more than bones left over from Henry Tudor's rapacious appetite.

Those who are more adventurous may visit living communities like those at Lee Abbey, the Northumbria Community and the eponymous Iona Community.

These emergent communities are reinvigorating ancient spiritual practices associated with hospitality, prayerfulness and creativity. Although modelled on the monastic life, they are a world apart from the images often associated with monasticism like poverty, chastity and obedience.



In March, Drs Elaine Heath and Larry Duggin visited Goulburn to share this new vision for 21<sup>st</sup> Century intentional communities based on prayer, hospitality, playfulness and neighbourhood engagement.

Elaine and Larry are co-directors of the Missional Wisdom Foundation based in Dallas, Texas and ministers with the United Methodist Church, the third largest denomination in America. Elaine teaches evangelism at Perkins School of Theology while Larry is an executive pastor for emerging worship at White's Chapel, a parish with nearly 6,000 people attending any week.

Elaine and Larry visited Australia as guests of Maggie and Darryl Patterson, an entrepreneurial couple with a passion to establish a community in Goulburn. Maggie

connected with Elaine and Larry's Foundation after searching for place that offered appropriate training and support.

'We just made plans to come and meet the Pattersons,' said Elaine, 'just to see what's going on and whether the Holy Spirit is call us to support them.'

The Foundation engages people from a range of denominations from Alaska to Florida. The Foundation operates several community houses in the Dallas-Forth Worth area in combination with an academy that uses web-based technology to teach and disseminate best practice globally.

'We hear all over the States, people looking for change because of the disconnect they experience between the activities of church and the needs of real communities,' said Larry. 'People want to find ways to serve the Gospel, taking what they love about the Church and making it more relevant to their daily lives and the way people live.'

As Dallas is home to many megachurches, the scale of Elaine and Larry's approach is strikingly different, after all, houses are limited by their number of bedrooms. In these communities, mission becomes a lifestyle.

'Intentional communities that pray and live together, working at the fringe, maintain their connections can contribute to changing the church as a whole,' observed Larry. The Foundation encourages such communities to work in collaboration with existing congregations.

The work of the Foundation is not limited to starting residential communities. The Foundation has developed the **New Day community** that encourages people share in the missional lifestyle by connecting with their neighbours while having their own living space. New Day is growing strongly as it helps African refugees settle into American life.

'So many people see change as part of an either/or equation. One of the keys we teach is yes/and thinking. It's about accepting new ways as adding to what the church does,' Larry said.

The message for Australian parishes was refreshingly simple. Congregations and fresh expressions are not mutually exclusive forms of church. They shouldn't be rivals for a parish's limited time and money.

With a little imagination and mutual commitment, these forms of church can enrich each other. Together, they deepen spiritual engagement as parishioners build new connections with their neighbours. And it works.

Larry and Elaine's new book, **Missional, Monastic, Mainline: a guide to starting missional micro-communities in historically mainline traditions (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014)** is now available.

By Archdeacon **Wayne Brighton**