



## Special Edition #2: Proxe Station Innovations, East and West Coast

# Deep Roots *big reach*

## EAST COAST: Creating “3rd Space” Through Proxe Stations by Greg Johnson

When I was eleven, I went on a class field trip to the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Spokane, Washington. We were studying the Middle Ages, and this was as close as we could get to Chartres. The magnificent gothic structure contained ornate stained glass windows and hundred foot ceilings. The tour guide told us that this cathedral actually took decades to construct (a difficult concept for an eleven year old) and he mused about why such energy and resources were devoted to the construction of such places of worship. Cathedrals speak of a more holistic time—when humans more naturally understood the connection between the design/creation of space and the worship of God, between the architect and the gospel.

Cathedrals focus our attention upwards, toward the heavens, toward God. The sheer quantity of space makes us aware of our own smallness and wraps us in a vast stillness—a Presence. No matter what you thought of the ser-

### The Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Spokane, Washington



mon from Sunday to Sunday, in the cathedral the holy space itself bridged the gap between the human and the divine. The Cathedral of John the Evangelist even made me feel close to God—even though at the time, I didn’t know or believe he existed.

It was while attending a nondescript, “big-box” church, where I gave my life to Jesus in high school. The church had no sanctuary, but rather an all purpose room, that served as a gymnasium when the chairs were not set up for the service.

I should clarify. I did not become a Christian *in* the box church, however...I did so when the youth group went away to winter camp, in the mountains of northeastern Washington. I wrestled with God in a tiny chapel surrounded by a stand of western red cedar. At the far end of the chapel was a simple wood cross. The sunlight streamed through the colored glass like rays of gold. Here I begged God to reveal himself to me. I tasted his presence later that night as we climbed the mountain behind the camp and gazed at the starry host. And I knew I was his when on the last night, in that meeting room—cedar paneled like the temple itself—I stood up and walked to a little table and ate a hunk of baguette, dipped in grape juice. As I returned to my pillow on the floor, I began to sob; I knew that Jesus died for me.

I went back to Riverside Camp as often as I could—because it was there most of

all that I felt close to God.

Spaces are powerful. Any architect will tell you that. In our work with InterVarsity at Brown University in Rhode Island, we are discovering that space is critical in evangelism. In some sense, God has given us a call to be both preacher and architect. We proclaim the gospel—but we also must design the right kind of space to do so.

The kind of space we create makes a huge difference. Often times, in our Christian meetings we neglect to think about what kind of space we are creating, and end up fashioning a space that is uncomfortable for anyone but Christians and maybe spiritual seekers. That is why for many years, few non-Christians ever came to our Large Group and few Christians brought friends.

There may be only three options in terms of evangelism and space. The first is when we ask people to come into our space. Any time we invite someone to an event, to a conference, to a Bible study, to hear a speaker – we are inviting them to hear about Jesus in our space. The main disadvantage is the sufficiently high barrier that prevents all but the people who are interested in coming and hearing about Jesus. For example, this is a good way to reach seeking students, but not a good way to reach students who are spiritually apathetic or cynical about God. Often, by focusing on bringing people into their spaces, Christian groups com-

pete over a tiny percentage of the campus. Leaving the vast majority to the frats, sororities, and professors.

The second evangelistic option is to try to create a neutral space. Groups Investigating God work so well in helping seekers to become followers because they do this. So often, seekers feel out of their league and element in a traditional Bible study where Christian students know way too much about the Bible and don’t live out enough of it. There is less space or no space for them to ask their burning questions—the space is not for them. However, almost every pre-Christian with whom I’ve open the scriptures in the context of a GIG has encountered Jesus in some way and appreciated their encounter—whether they took the next step in their faith journey or not.

I wonder if part of the appeal here is that non-Christians know that even though there are certain ground rules, the space belongs to them as well. When we invite well to a GIG, we communicate essentially, “this space is designed for you.” While we make it clear that we want them to take the next step and the GIG will not go on forever, we do try our best to create a neutral space, a safe space. This space is created in the coffee shop, the dorm lounge, or the student union. We use a real life “hook” to demystify Jesus (as much

as that is possible) to communicate that they already know something about Jesus and the Bible, whether they’ve read it or not—that they already know the questions for which Jesus speaks an answer. And while it has felt extremely difficult to get non-Christians to start coming to a Bible study—it is easy to get them to a GIG. And we, the GIG leader, share vulnerably first—to show that we’re a learner, just like them. This is the magic of a neutral space.

But perhaps the most important space is not one we create—but the one that already exists. Our third option is to move our evangelism into the public space—a space that in large part, does not naturally lead students to God. Sure, there might be inscriptions in Latin on ancient buildings like “en deo speramus” or “veritas” or “for the greater glory of God”—but for the large part, Christians have abandoned the public spaces of the campus. Our evangelism strategy consists of inviting non-Christians into our spaces (which take up a tiny part of the physical and temporal space of any given week on campus). Or perhaps it consists of creating neutral spaces. However, in these spaces, we’re selecting for people who already want to be there—Christians and hard-core seekers. Few students who are religiously apathetic or cynical or skeptical will ever come without massive advertising and great personal invitations or some other hook.

This is why Proxe Stations and conversational

## 3rd Space (cont.)

evangelism is so important, because they actually bring God into the public space—Bible style. When we put up a Proxe Station at the busiest intersection on the quad, or in the student union building, or in the dorm lounge—we are sharing about God in public space. We are, of course, creating a mobile Divine space in the midst of a secular space. But as we draw students into the Proxe and subsequent conversation, they encounter the Divine in the very spot where the day before they stumbled through drunk or rushed by to hand in a paper. This evangelism style is Biblical. Paul's missionary journeys consisted of finding the central spaces—the synagogue, the marketplace, Mars Hill—and making it a place of encounter. In this way, a Proxe Station uses art and the logic of the gospel to do what Paul did in Acts 17, to locate God's presence within the culture and then to build upon that in order to present the gospel in the public space. Recently, we did a Proxe Station at Brown University in New England. The Proxe Station focused on human trafficking. We

discovered that students appreciated being educated about this issue and that they were also open to hearing how Jesus' death and resurrection. Such traditionally theologically abstract concepts became real and relevant to them through the art and issue of trafficking and they were more than open to explore Christ in public space as a result.

Because we were in public space, we encountered and engaged with students who would otherwise never hear of Jesus and certainly would never come to our meetings. Although God is omnipresent—he is ignored on the Main Green at Brown. But our Proxe engineered a new focal point and actually transformed the public space for two afternoons into a cathedral—where students encountered the Living God and his Story of Redemption. Because students encountered him there, we know they'll be more likely to step into a neutral space or even...into our space to hear more.

### The Process: Listening Prayer and Community

After practicing listening prayer for 4-5 months and hearing from the Lord, we designed the Stations of the Cross Proxe Station experience. Beginning our Proxe Station development in prayer allowed us to slow down long enough to hear from the Holy Spirit and to follow what he was already doing on cam-

## WEST COAST: Proxe Stations of the Cross by Abner Ramos

all have familiarity with a theology that focuses on Jesus' suffering. We used our spring break to study the Passion narrative in Mark, and to help our students design Proxy Stations that took the themes of the Passion and the ELAC context in mind. Before this, we also studied Ephesians 2, and looked at the Catholic church's Stations of the Cross to give us ideas for what we might come up with. I was blown away by the student's ability to think through the brokenness of the world, Jesus death,

statistics (on poverty, sexual abuse, violence, drug use, etc), quotes on suffering, and scriptures about the sin of the world on the side boards. There are broken mirrors everywhere (they are meant to give the viewer a physical representation of our spiritual condition). We will ask students two initial questions:

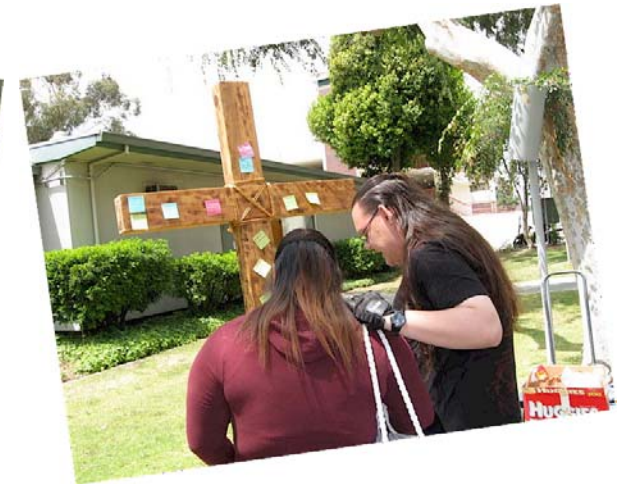
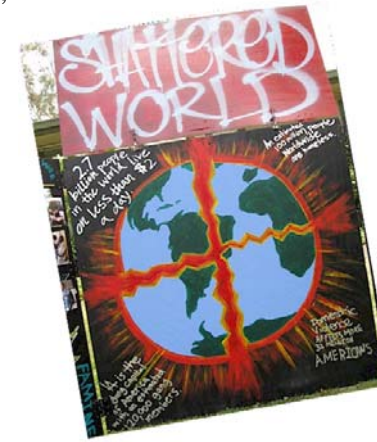
- 1) How is the world shattered? and 2) How has this impacted your life?

At this point we ask students to write

viewer a sense that all the chaos from the first station is made right by the cross. At this point we will explain what Jesus went through the week he died, the crucifixion, and how Jesus relates to the problems of east Los Angeles (betrayal, violence, denial, doubt, death and suffering; all themes we got from studying the Passion narratives in Mark). Scriptures of God's love for the world will be displayed on the side boards. We will ask students, "Can I tell you how Jesus' death on the cross has healed the spiritual

At the end of the week, a speaker will be preaching about Jesus' death on the cross and inviting people to make commitments to Jesus.

*GOAL: To give people space to interact with Jesus, and invite them to our outreach event and bible study.*



pus and in the hearts of students. While we believe this Proxe Station experience is a strong one, strategy alone cannot win lost souls. Through prayer and following the Holy Spirit, we were able not only to help prepare the spiritual ground but also to walk in what God was already doing.

The Lord had been putting it on our hearts to preach about the cross since last semester. We had several prayer meetings where the Spirit was convicted us to tell the story of the crucifixion. Overall, this makes sense at East Los Angeles College (ELAC). Most of the students (and administration) are Catholic, so they

atonement, conversion, and discipleship. I've been at ELAC for 8 years now and I've never seen students so committed to creating something that will communicate the gospel clearly to their friends. I don't have time to tell you all our conversations/arguments word for word, but let me just say that what they came up with is spectacular. Again, I'm blown away by their creativity and passion to share the gospel. Being in mission together has brought so much joy to my heart.

### First Station: Shattered World

An image of the earth exploding into four pieces is at the center, with

how the brokenness of the world has affected them on shattered mirrors on the side boards. We will share with them how our world has also been shattered. The next question will be "how have you contributed to the world being shattered?"

*GOAL: To help students identify their sinfulness.*

### Second Station: Restored World

The second station will have a peaceful earth in the middle, with a crucifix made of bloody bandages holding the four broken pieces of the world together (one of our students even made a papier-mâché Jesus for the cross). The image is supposed to give the

brokenness in our world?" and "would you like to pray that Jesus would heal your shattered spiritual world?"

*GOAL: To help students identify and apply the fact that Jesus death on the cross makes all things right.*

### Third Station: The Cross

Students will be able to write their prayer requests on small pieces of paper and nail them to an 8-foot cross. We will ask them to share their prayer requests and offer to pray for them on the spot. We will also invite them to bible study on Thursday afternoons.



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