
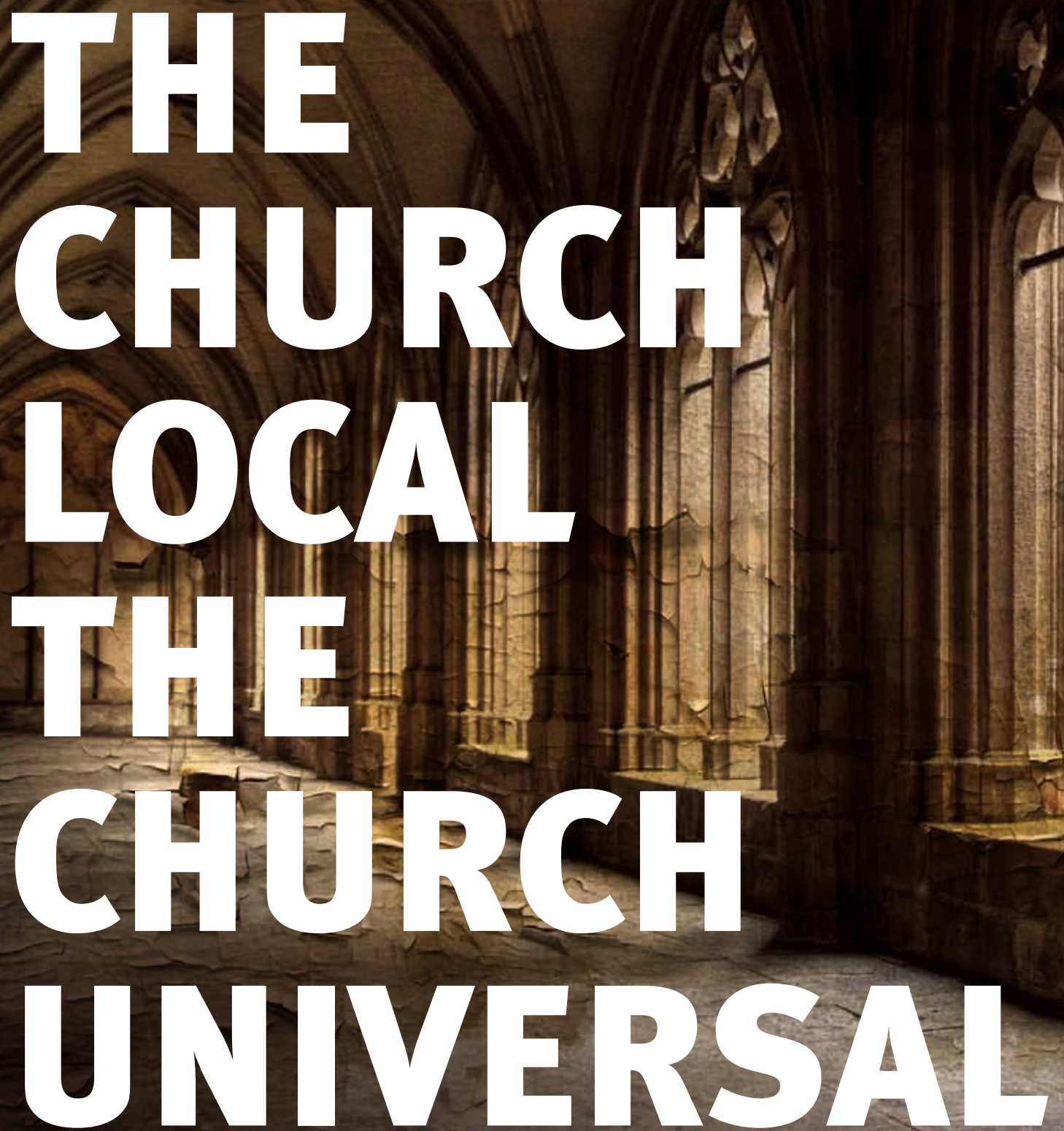


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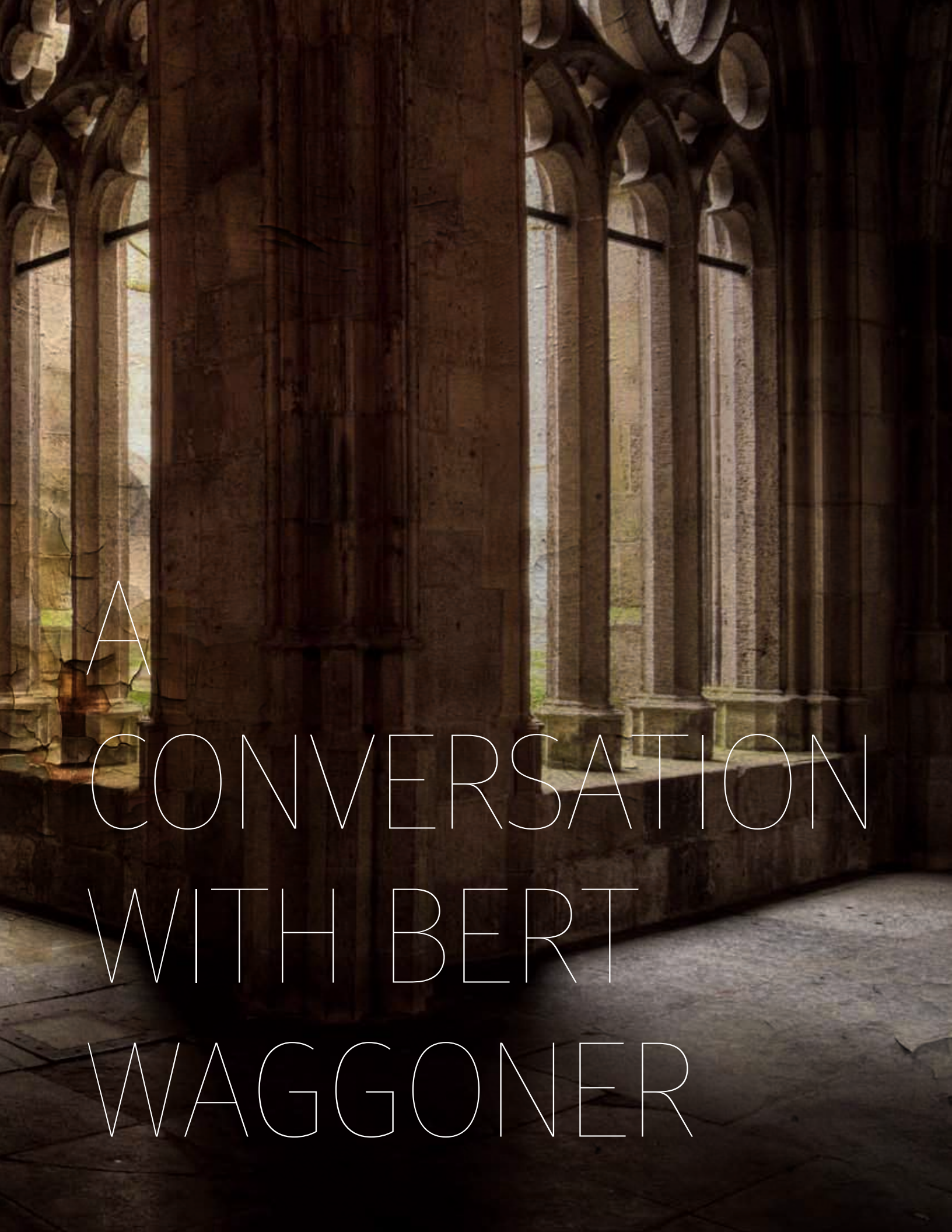
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THE CHURCH
OF JESUS IS
THE HOPE
OF THE WORLD



**THE
CHURCH
LOCAL
THE
CHURCH
UNIVERSAL**



A
CONVERSATION
WITH BERT
WAGGONER

Jeff Heidkamp: Bert, could you talk a little bit about the relationship between a local congregation and the universal church? What's the relationship between the two? Could a person be a part of one without the other?

Bert Waggoner: In the New Testament, the primary focus is on the local church. That means the full expression of the church, in a real sense, is in each local church. The part is equal to the whole when the New Testament speaks about it. Each local church possesses not a fragment of Christ but the whole of Christ.

As far as the relationship, I see the universal church as being a proleptic community, an eschatological gathering. It is a reality we will experience at the consummation of the age, but right now we can know it only through our involvement in the local church. Bible students have sometimes advocated a platonic idea of the church where the universal church is seen as the "real church," and the "particular church" is only a shadow of the universal. This understanding could not be further from the truth. The universal church is something that will be experienced when the kingdom comes in its fullness and all of us come together around the throne of God.

I believe the church is absolutely essential to one's relationship with Christ and spiritual growth. Our faith is mediated to us through the church. The content of the faith, the New Testament itself, is something that was given to us through the church. Again, it's absolutely essential. Calvin said it well: "He who does not have the Church for his mother cannot have God for his father." This is why I believe the church is something to die for. This is why I believe in church planting. This is why my primary joy and motivation in ministry is the health of the local church. Because it is through the church that Christ is glorified and people come into the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

JH: Is every believer a member of the church?

BW: The thought, "I belong to the universal church but not a particular church" is not acceptable. In order to be a part of the universal church, you must be a part of a local church. You could be a good member or a bad member, but being a part of a local church is vital for one's ongoing relationship with Christ. For example, Paul mentions being "in Christ" something like 164 times in his Epistles. Many of those references are found in Ephesians and Colossians. The important thing to realize is that in most cases "in Christ" is a reference to the church. To be "in Christ" is not just a mystical relationship between you and Jesus. Rather, "in Christ" means "in the body of Christ." When you look at everything that's mediated to us "in Christ," you begin to understand the importance of the church.

JH: So then, from a societal standpoint, what constitutes a local church? How would a person know that they were in one? And can we detect "illegitimate" forms of a local church?

BW: Historically, the creeds give definition to what constitutes the church, and I think it's hard to improve on what they say. The Apostle's Creed describes the church as: "One, holy, catholic, apostolic." I think all of those are essential marks of a true church. These are the things that must be evident in a group of people to properly be called a church of Jesus Christ.

First, the church must be *one*. Any church that isolates itself and doesn't intentionally build relationship with the rest of the church is probably illegitimate. Jesus prayed that his people would be one even as he and the Father are one. Oneness with all the church is a true mark of the church.

Secondly, a church is to be *holy*; that is, something birthed and set apart by the Spirit. The church is not solely a human enterprise. The sanctifying, empowering, guiding presence of the Spirit must be there. For a church to be authentic, it must be holy in the sense of being a community of the Spirit. This is what makes it unique among other institutions and sociological groups in the world.

A third thing the church characterizes is *catholicity*. Catholic means "universal." The church that is truly catholic is one that believes what has been believed at all times and everywhere. We don't make up the faith now. We take what is given to us from the past...through Scripture and the great universal creeds...and through what has been passed down to us through the generations. We're fundamentally tied to the apostles and prophets. If a group doesn't have those orthodox actions of preaching, teaching, and living out the faith expressed to us in Scriptures and in ancient creeds, I would say they're not an authentic church.

Fourth, the *apostolic* nature of the church is essential. Apostolic means "to be sent." We must be involved in mission in the world. Although we may receive insight and fellowship in a worship service, those activities are not enough to constitute a church. This gathered group must also go out as sent people. God is a missional God; we are in Christ; therefore, we are missional as an apostolic unit. We're taking what was given from the past into the future.

JH: This part is different from some reformed definitions of church that focus largely on the act of preaching, the giving of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.

BW: I think there was a fundamental weakness in the definitions given to the church in the reformed community. They tended to focus church on *place* rather than on *mission*. So you have the church existing when it comes together to practice sacraments, hear the word of God, and exercise discipline. I would distance my definition from that. The church is fundamentally and essentially a missional community. Mission is to the church as hydrogen is to water.

JH: What about the current trend of anti-institutionalism within that sent people? How should the people, the church, regard itself as an institution? Are there dangers with anti-institutionalism?

BW: First, anti-institutionalism is not unique to the church. It's a cultural phenomenon. Modern and postmodern life is characteristically anti-institutional. This is philosophically driven and reflects the "rugged individualism" that characterizes Western modern man. From Descartes on, we've made the individual the center of the universe. This has led to ever-increasing fragmentation of human life and even a concerted effort to destroy all institutions.

God designed society to function through institutions. They are a human essential. One of His first acts in creation was to place Adam

and Eve in an institution: the institution of marriage. And then there is the institution of the people of God, Israel, through which God's plans for redemption were to be realized. Furthermore, God placed us all in families – another institution. In every case, where God wanted something done, he created an institution through which it could be accomplished. Institutions validate the fact that humans are social beings. Institutions provide tremendous emotional support and give roots to people as well as giving them projections for the future.

Without institutions, the focus of life is directed only to the present. You don't take anything from the past. You don't think of passing anything on into the future. It's all about living in the now. Anti-institutionalism is destructive spiritually, socially, emotionally, and even physically. We are relational creatures and we need institutions.

Institutions are instruments that God has designed to pass on values, customs, practices, and faith. They provide so much — and seldom do institutions fail us. It's the people within those institutions who lose sight of what the institution is for. Then they corrupt the institution by using it for their own selfish advantage rather than the purpose for which it was made.

We couldn't live without institutions. We have the institution of law. Who would want to go out on the streets of our cities if we didn't have it? I wouldn't want to function within a society that didn't have laws that governed the way we relate to one another. I wouldn't want to deposit my money in a banking system that didn't have institutions in place to make sure my money was protected.

Now, more specifically, anti-institutionalism plays out in terms of people not seeing the importance of the church as an institution. It's really interesting that Paul argues from the value of the church to certain behaviors that its importance demands. For example, he does this with the Corinthians in his discussion about the Lord's Supper. The assumption is that the church is extremely important to God. It is so important that if you violate the body of Christ, by inequality and injustice to the poor at the Lord's Supper, the eating of the Supper could cause you to be sick, weak, or even die. He went so far as to say that this was already happening. "Many of you are sick, many of you are weak, and some of you die because you don't discern the body of Christ. The argument? "Don't mess with the church. If you do, it is so important to God that serious consequences could follow."

But it's evident in the attitudes that people have toward the church that they value it only in terms of what it will give them, not for what it is itself. They think of the church as something they should shop around for, as something designed to meet their needs, rather than as something to give their lives for.

There is a quote that really captures this tension between individualism and the nature of the church. In Eugene Peterson's book *Reversed Thunder*, he says this:

"The gospel is never for individuals but always for people. Sin fragments. It separates us and sends us to some solitary confinement. Gospel restores us, unites us, and sets us in a community. The life of faith reveals the nurtured in the biblical narratives as highly personal but never merely individual. Always there is a family, a tribe, a nation, a church."

He goes on to say, "The gospel pulls us into community. One of the immediate changes that the gospel makes is grammatical. We instead of I, our instead of my, us instead of me. Sin, both our own and that of others, drives us into customized selfishness. Separation from God becomes separation from neighbor. The same salvation that restores our relationship with God reinstates us in the community of persons who live by faith. Every tendency to privatism and individualism distorts and falsifies the gospel. The Bible knows nothing of the soul who wrestles alone with the alone."

JH: Some intellectuals might say, "Bert, you're totally wrong. Institutions corrupt the purity of the church. The pure church would just seek the gospel and seek mission on its own terms. But as soon as institutions build up, they automatically corrupt that purity." How would you respond to that?

BW: First of all, I would say, look at the New Testament. It's the story of the development of an institution – an institution built by God. Is a movement that becomes an institution something of the flesh, or is it a gift of the Spirit? Look at the book of Acts. The church was already institutionalized by the time Paul reached Rome. But it is clearly more institutionalized in Timothy than it is in Acts. Is the church seen in Timothy less spiritual than in Acts — or is the institutional development a work of the Spirit? It seems to me that it's a work of the Spirit. If we're going to argue from the standpoint of the purity of the church, the New Testament church in its early days as seen in the book of Acts isn't any purer than the later institutional church of Paul's later days as seen in Timothy. It was much more institutionalized in the later church, but not less holy or less spiritual.

The problem with the institutional church (or any institution) comes when it loses its moral purpose. Without clear moral and spiritual purpose, the church can be as destructive or as ineffective as any other institution. So the problem is not the institution. It's the loss of its moral purpose that corrupts the church as an institution.

Most have heard of the Enron scandal here in Houston. Enron was a good institution that was designed to distribute gas to heat homes and businesses. When that purpose was violated, the institution became abusive and was used to benefit certain individuals. A good institution, with loss of true purpose, became destructive. Some say, "Let's just go back to the pure way of doing it, back to a way that's not institutional. Let's just be a movement of God." Well, it won't work. All movements that survive take on institutional form. Even if you have a small group, there's going to be somebody that's leading it, a place you meet, and some understanding about when and what you are going to do. There's going to be some way that the members understand things are going to be carried out. These are simple forms of an institution.

JH: What are the challenges to the church in the 21st century with maintaining its moral compass, its spiritual compass, its holiness, and its apostolicity? What are the struggles it faces against becoming corrupt and destroying its own essential purpose?

continued on page 27

CUTTING EDGE

BOOK REVIEW

ON THINKING INSTITUTIONALLY

BY HUGH HECLO



Helpful books give us insights and strategies to work through the problems we already recognize in our lives. But exceptional books perceive the problems lying below the surface—they see things in us that we can't easily see in ourselves. Hugh Hecló's *On Thinking Institutionally* is an exceptional book. There are plenty of jeremiads expounding on what is “wrong” with the evangelical church, and many of them are helpful. However, none

to my knowledge confront the issues that Hecló does. *On Thinking Institutionally* is a book written by a political scientist, yes—but it is not really about politics. It delves more deeply to unearth the social processes that inform institutions as diverse as politics, church, and baseball. Hecló puts his finger on anti-institutionalism itself as a force that is increasingly problematic in many of the central structures of society. (I should note at the front end that Dr. Hecló was unavailable for interview, but graciously gave permission for extensive quotation from the work itself.)

Hecló acknowledges that a degree of skepticism or doubt in regard to any institution is healthy. But he differentiates this from an overarching mood of anti-institutionalism that goes far beyond this. “Skepticism is a matter of exercising our critical faculties to question others’ claims and demand an accounting. The modern inclination to distrust typically goes beyond that...The modern view expects the worst because it has already reached the conclusion that institutions and their leaders are generally oppressive and self-serving. This widespread view of the institutional apparatus that surrounds us is not critical or skeptical. The correct word for it is ‘cynical.’” (13)

It’s not as if there is no good reason for anti-institutional cynicism; Hecló lays out the case for this phenomena carefully, and it is complex.

The first set of reasons he calls “performance-based.” He thoughtfully lays out a whole set of scandals and improprieties from every corner of public life: from Congress to church, from banks to baseball players. The public effect of these scandals are heightened by the “display effect” of constant media attention and ideological spin machines coming from every corner of the political and cultural spectrum.

Furthermore, the spin machines themselves, what Hecló labels the “PR effect,” create widespread cynicism about information itself, as the public increasingly senses that all the messages it receives are simply the manipulations of a corporate public relations strategy.

But as powerful as these performance-based effects are, Hecló points to what is perhaps an even deeper and more profound cause of anti-institutionalism—a “culture-based” effect. The unwritten “semi-golden rule” of modern culture is that “every person should be free to seek out his or her own Golden Rule without being judged or casting judgments on others.” (34)

Hecló then demonstrates the upshot: “It takes one short step to connect this dominant cultural norm to an explanation for our widespread distrust of institutions. Whatever else might be said about them, all institutions present themselves as authoritative rules for behavior...Modern thinking inherently distrusts institutions because they are barriers and weights that impede our personal journeys toward meaning. The semi-Golden Rule tends to overrule what is most institutional about institutions.” (35)

All this in mind, we can ask the question, “So what?” Why does it matter if people deeply distrust institutions? In some sense, aren’t we glad to be free of so many of the seemingly oppressive institutions of the past—the grinding formality of Sunday morning dress-up, the arcane religious rules of early fundamentalism? Maybe, but Hecló would encourage us to look a bit deeper. He challenges us to move from “thinking about institutions” to “thinking institutionally.” The distinction is worth noting.

“To think about art is not the same thing as having an artistic view of the world, just as thinking about science is not identical to thinking like a scientist. To think about religion is clearly not the same thing as being religious in your approach to daily life. Likewise, as I have learned over the years, to think about marriage is certainly not the same thing as thinking like a married person... An internal perspective shows something different...When the house is on fire, a person who rushes to save the family photo album rather than the television set or latest game

player is expressing a form of institutional thinking. That person has thought with a familial appropriateness.” (84-85)

In other words, it is not enough simply to stand outside an institution like a church and to critique it—as if what really matters is our disinterested, objective opinion. Rather, the richness and contribution of institutions to our lives comes as we inhabit them. Think of Paul’s image of the institutional church as an interdependent body in which we share a common purpose and direction under the headship of Christ. In some sense, anti-institutionalism is ultimately the step-child of radical individualism—individualism that the gospel clearly rejects.

Furthermore, institutional thinking helps us to clarify our obligations, both to the past and the future. It can be easy to set these at odds. The progressivists leap into the future with little consideration of what has come. The preservationists reject all change as an abandonment of what has already been achieved.

But Hecló suggests a third way.

“When thinking institutionally, current decisions are made with a continuing awareness that you are enjoying the fruits of something belonging to predecessors and successors. Therefore, while change is inevitable, the recognition of its implications is embedded in a strong appreciation for what has gone on before you were here and what will go on after you are gone.” (110)

This is perhaps the crucial point for church planters and leaders. It is quite easy to consider in the development of congregations and ministries only the immediate future—having the largest possible immediate impact. And yet, we must reflect on what we have received from the past—that without the canon, the creeds, the churches, the values of last decade, last century, and last millennium, we would have no basis on which to move forward. It is too easy to take the small percentage that clearly must be rejected as the rule rather than the exception and then to “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” pretending that we are in some way constructing a vision for ourselves that is entirely new and unique.

And with perhaps even more difficulty, we must reflect on the future, on the unintended consequences of what we are building now. Since the future remains unopened to us, our best guide is again significant reflection on the past, on the inherited institutional frameworks in which we operate.

Perhaps in this sense we can say that Jesus, the wisdom of God, is our greatest example. If you measure his life merely by what he built immediately, he might be dismissed as a minor first-century religious revivalist who made a bit of a stir but was summarily executed by the Romans. However, in his brief ministry, Jesus built for the future. He mentored leaders. He taught in a style that could be timelessly transmitted through the ages. He gave us his Holy Spirit to empower our continued ministry of his Kingdom. He established the meaning-filled rituals of baptism and the Lord’s Supper so that the most central beliefs and actions of his life would be deeply impressed not only on the soul but on the body of all his future followers.

Ultimately, Christ-centered institutional thinking is Kingdom thinking. It does not place our own preferences, our own success, at the center. Instead it places at the center the building of the congregations and disciples who will relay the message of hope and salvation in Jesus until the Kingdom comes in all its fullness.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

What does it mean to say that the church of Jesus is the hope of the world? It means very specific, personal things to each person who experiences it. We collected stories from all over the country describing how the kingdom of the living God breaks into people's lives through his Spirit-empowered followers.

DULUTH VINEYARD

How God increased one church's evangelistic effectiveness in startling ways. Adapted from Michael Gatlin

No matter how missionally oriented we think we are, there is always a lot of room for growth. This is true about every area of my life (husband, father, pastor, everything). One of the things I've discovered indispensable for leadership is that I need to get honest with what is really going on. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says, "The path to change begins when we are regularly confronted with the brutal facts or our current reality." I need to accept true reality before I can subscribe to my dreams about leadership.

A while back, one of the things I noticed in my life is that when I take the time and space to really get honest—about my personal life, about my leadership, about the results—a couple of things happen. First, the results of my honest evaluation are not usually stellar. I'm generally not as well off as I would like to think I am. In fact, I'm not sure there's real honesty going on if all the news is good news. And secondly, I have an opportunity for real growth. That's really where the story begins.

Conflicted Views of Evangelism

Evangelism had always been something I was not naturally very good at. I had attended a good Baptist Bible college. I'd heard all the talks, some



bad and some good. The bad ones left me feeling like a failure because I didn't have enough notches on my belt. After listening to these things and replaying them in my mind year after year, I actually began to wonder if I was even saved myself.

I always felt a bit tongue-tied and clumsy as I tried to share either my faith or the claims of the gospel. I felt embarrassed, in a junior-high-telling-a-girl-that-you-liked-her kind of way. I've never thought that I have "gift of evangelism" or that I was in any way an "evangelist." In fact, to be completely honest, people that claimed to possess this gift generally annoyed me. I often felt as though they were looking down on me because of my lack of effectiveness (whether or not that was actually true). And I felt as though they were driving me toward something I had no hope of ever accomplishing.

Discipleship is a Process

But actually, people take all sorts of different paths to come to Jesus. There was this cute girl in high school who wouldn't let me take her on a date to anywhere but church. So I took her there...and eventually, I heard about Jesus. For other people, maybe it was a crisis, a feeling that life was about to overwhelm them in some way.

All of the early disciples traveled some sort of unique path in moving toward Christ. And I began to realize that I didn't care exactly what path people took, as long as I could help them move just a bit closer to Christ along the way.

So I started to think that discipleship and evangelism was a process. And I just want to be involved—to play that game.

Census Time

One of the "honest feedback" opportunities that comes around the Vineyard every single year is the annual census. It comes from the national office and asks for the straight hard facts: our average attendance, how many people consider our church home, how many people have become Christians, how many people have been baptized in the past year, etc. Each year I got that census, and I never knew how to answer the salvation question. I knew personally I had been involved in helping to introduce a couple of folks to Jesus, and I knew of a few others who had become Christians, but the annual number was always pretty small. One year it may have been 12. Another year, maybe 20. But to be honest, I was essentially guessing once I got over 10. I didn't want to lie, but maybe I was participating in that pastoral temptation to speak in evangelistic terms.

Every year I felt bad about the number I was writing down. It seemed too small. I knew I wanted the number to be larger. I wanted to be making a bigger impact in our city. I wanted to do what Jesus had told us to do: make disciples.

Small Changes, More Fruitfulness

I really wanted to change. I didn't want to be so timid about sharing the gospel. Corporately, I wanted to lead our church to actually do this kind of ministry—to see us bring people into real, life-changing discipleship

with Jesus. But I wanted to see them there from the very beginning—where they first surrendered their lives to Christ as Lord and Savior. As I continued to read and study the Scriptures, as I prayed and prayed, I realized that this was truly something God wanted to address in my life and in the life of the Duluth Vineyard.

I read books on the subject, by Reinhard Bonnke and Billy Graham. I listened to VLI intensive seminars by Rich Nathan and David Parker. And I prayed. I also interacted with other pastors who were seeing good fruit in these areas. One day I was at a coffee shop with Andy Smith and Allen Scott, two Vineyard pastors working in Northern Ireland. As we were talking about this issue, they challenged me to begin to make it an object of prayer every day. Allen told me how he was asking God for a specific number of people to become Christians in his church that year. It was a bit unsettling.

When I got back home, I started to pray that we would be an evangelistic church every single day. As I was praying one particular day, I felt like God was asking me, "How many do you want?" And I thought, "More than 20!"

Wow. *How many DO I want?* I wondered. I wanted the number to be low enough to be realistic, but high enough to be sure it was God's handiwork at the end of the year. I felt like 100 people was the number I should begin to ask for. That was right before Easter 2006.

I began to ask God if he would let us participate in introducing 100 people over the rest of that year to Christ. I thought about Paul telling Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist," and I began to ask God what should change in my schedule.

Each day as I prayed about this, God began to speak to me about some systemic changes we needed to make. Some of the changes were about how I spent my time. Other changes had to do with my preaching; my weekend talks. I changed the expectations for our staff and leaders. We began to reevaluate some of the questions we were asking at our staff and leadership meetings.

This vision began to leak out in my messages. Now, I tried to put it into my messages a couple of times, but I would be chicken and withdraw. But then, one week, it just slipped out. And then I started to talk about it at all three of our weekend services.

We made lots of changes along the way...I had to make lots of internal and personal changes and confront a lot of things in others and in myself. We adjusted our prayer ministry, my messages, and specific training opportunities. But all of it slowly began to bear fruit.

One woman—whose father was in the hospital and was just about to die—took the invitation I had given that past weekend and used the same words to invite her dad to give his life to Christ. And he did! She came to me in tears the next week, thanking me for giving her the words to talk to her dad.

At the end of that first year, as near as we can tell, we had 97 people who had made a commitment to be a follower of Jesus Christ. 97 new people who were not following Jesus the year before. Nearly 97 different

families whose lives were impacted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That was an incredible miracle.

In 2005, we had 20 people come to Christ. In 2009, we had 290. Overall, we have had 814 people receive Jesus in the last five years.

Gordy and Annie

There is a story of one very sweet and cool couple, Gordy and Annie. Gordy was 55, and Annie, 65. Gordy attended our Blessing of the Bikes in May 2008. He decided to come back a week or so later. The first time back, he walked into church wearing a T-shirt that proclaimed: "My parents said I could be anything I wanted to be, so I became an ___hole."

The greeter who told me about it had tears in his eyes because he got to be part of a church where this man could come in wearing that t-shirt and be fully accepted.

I made it a point to sit with Gordy at the barbecue after the service. He was intentionally offensive to see what reaction he might get from me and another couple. "You're not getting offended very easily, are you?" he asked after a while. He came to church a few more times, and surprisingly, he always made it a point to connect with me and stand near the front door as I welcomed people to the church. In fact, we eventually became friends.

Several times Gordy invited me out to his house to meet his wife, Annie, and to see his garage full of motorcycles. After our services and barbecue I'd always be pretty tired. Honestly, I wanted to watch golf and take a nap. But one day Brenda and I took the time to ride out to his place and visit Gordy and Annie. The house was kind of dark. Shades closed. Depressed.

We found out more of their story. The two of them hadn't been in a church for nearly 30 years. They were kicked out of a large Lutheran church because of rowdy kids. We invited Annie to the Vineyard, but she refused. She later confessed that she had secretly made a commitment that if Gordy was still attending Vineyard after the first of the year, then she would give it a try. She didn't want to come, extend herself in that way, and then have Gordy change his mind. It would have hurt too much.

True to her word, the first weekend after the new year, Annie showed up trembling. And after the service she came up front for prayer. Brenda prayed for her, and the second weekend she came up for prayer again. Then she surrendered her life to Jesus.

They came to a newcomer's class later that evening, and Gordy accepted Christ! The two of them signed up to become members of the church immediately. The following weekend, the couple came to an Unchained service, which is a longer service dedicated to healing with an hour of worship at the front end. Christy Wimber was the guest speaker, and the room that normally held 200 people had over 400 in it. Christy asked everyone who struggled with depression to raise their hands. Annie raised hers.

The next day, Gordy called me. He was very concerned that Annie had stopped taking her anti-depression medication, and he wanted to know

what to do. He told me how she had cried that morning while looking out the window at the beauty of their yard.

Not long after that, Gordy showed up with a rather large book, the AA's Big Book, and wanted to talk about tithing. "I want all of God's blessing, not just half of it!" he said. It was clear that God was moving in a huge way in Gordy and Annie.

Gordy invited 30 people to watch him get baptized on February 22, 2009. A year after he had first come to the Vineyard, Gordy himself helped direct parking at the Blessing of the Bikes 2009. His story had come full-circle.

Evangelism is not simply about numbers. Evangelism is not just about getting people to pray a prayer. Evangelism is about *real people like Gordy and Annie meeting Jesus, encountering the king of the kingdom and having their lives healed*. It takes time. It's a process of introducing people to Jesus, and this kind of real relationship can be hard work. I had to make a choice not to take a nap the day we visited Gordy and Annie. Instead, we had to enter into their lives...and pray for them...and love them.

VINEYARD COLUMBUS

How this church's community center is reaching out to the heart of the city. Adapted from material provided by Will Shearer

We at the Vineyard Columbus in Columbus, Ohio built a community center for our neighborhood. Many people are drawn in who might never enter a church community otherwise. Among other services, we put on an after-school and summer program for children called The Zone. Last year, there was a small Muslim girl who was in the second grade class. The second and third grade classes had been studying different names of God. We could tell that God was really working on this little girl. She asked questions during class and began bowing her head with us when we prayed. There had been little signs for a while that God was really touching her.

One day in particular, our Muslim girl had a conversation with a Zone staff member. She asked a number of important questions. At the end of that day, one of our leaders was praying with another little girl, and our little Muslim girl "happened" to be in the area to watch the whole thing. Afterward, the Muslim girl walked up and asked our leader why she was praying with the other girl. Our leader answered that that the other little girl wanted Jesus to "live in her heart." One question led to another, and God burst into this young life: the Muslim girl asked if she could do that too. They prayed together, and the Muslim girl asked Jesus to live in her heart.

Now she's a bold little girl who is excited about everything. God has given her a unique and beautiful joy.

In 2008, we added many new sports and exercise programs to our community center, from dance aerobics to boot camp, from indoor soccer to 11 summer sports camps. All of a sudden, private schools from around Ohio started calling us to ask about scheduling games against our high school basketball team. The problem was, we didn't *have* a basketball team, and we weren't even planning on it.





But after a while, we decided to try it. We held high school tryouts for those wanting a life-changing experience through basketball. It resulted in a team of 10 boys, led by three volunteer coaches. We had a meeting about purchasing uniforms for the team, but unfortunately we had no idea where the money would come from. We didn't have a chance to solicit anyone for funds, however, because the next day we received a check in the mail from a corporate foundation for exactly the amount we needed.

The team practiced three to four times a week and had class once a week to discuss their goals and dreams, what they believed and did not believe, and what it means to "do life well." By the end of the season, the team had gone undefeated, beating some very good competitive schools from around Ohio.

But this was not the big success. The highlight of this story is that every single boy on that team found Jesus.

Another of our missions is to provide an opportunity for people to grow in their faith as they provide free health care to those in need. Thomas (not his real name) has had a very difficult time since being paralyzed in an accident in 2006. In the last three years, Thomas' wife has left him, he has spent all of his savings on medical bills, and he has been denied Medicaid. Although he is in the United States legally, and was gainfully employed with benefits until his accident, he is not yet a U.S. citizen. Thomas wrote to us and said this:

"I might not be an American citizen yet, but I am a human being and living in a human being society. Like any human I would like to see my children growing in the best way possible. Please help."

We wanted to serve Thomas and offer him the love of Christ through phone calls, e-mails, face-to-face medical care, and prayer ministry at our free medical clinic. We network with other free clinics and health care providers around the city to try to help meet Thomas' needs. Through this, the Lord has blessed us with the opportunity to share His love in many meaningful ways.

Vineyard Community Center's Social Outreach Programs include our GED education program. As the demand for classes increased during 2008-09, we expanded our program to offer both daytime and evening classes for students preparing to take the GED test. From 2008 to 2009, we had over 50 students graduate and receive their GED diploma.

It's hard to talk about our program without seeing the faces of the students in our minds...they leave impressions on us long after they've graduated. John was one such student, a young father of three. He came to our program in the fall and was determined to graduate. He was a quiet student, but always came with a smile. We were so proud when John passed the test, but never expected to see him again. A few weeks later, John walked into class with his three children. We introduced John as our most recent graduate and offered our congratulations. John just smiled, turned to his children and said, "I wanted my kids to meet the teachers that have changed our lives forever. You believed in me and made what seemed impossible, possible. Words really can't express how thankful I am."

We'll never forget John or that thank-you.

Our center is entirely staffed and funded by people of Vineyard Columbus, and we are often struck by how lives can be completely changed simply by having a practical need met in love.

MIAMI VINEYARD

How a church is growing in size, love, and diversity.

Adapted from Nik Korba

In Miami, the Vineyard has grown from a small church plant to an established church of thousands of people. Our growth has been slow and steady over the years, but I think the shocker happened when we realized we were serving over 100 dozen donuts every weekend! (Now it's more than 200 dozen.) Numerically, it has been quite a ride.

It's hard to dial up a long list of stories of transformation, because we don't focus too much on the deep story. We don't have a venue for it. It seems that the focus of the Miami Vineyard is to be more of a place for people to come to church, then to come to Christ. We work hard to provide a regular "rest stop" for people to be exposed to God. A lot of our stories are more about people finding the Vineyard. Then they can tell their own stories of finding Christ.

We give away free Pepsi on the roads in Miami. One of our members was walking up the line of stopped cars saying, "Free coke. No joke," when a big truck-driver type leaned down out of his cement mixer to ask what was going on. Jim handed him a Pepsi and said, "We're just giving you this ice-cold drink to tell you that God loves you."

The man in the truck responded by bursting into tears.

Years ago I was leading one of these outreaches myself, and a lady who attended the church came to participate. She explained to me that she came to the church because she received a free Pepsi. I asked her for the details, and she said she suffered from anxiety attacks. One Saturday morning she was on the verge of an attack, sitting in her car at a stoplight, and she started praying to God to help her get through the moment. At that very instant, a person appeared at her window with a free Pepsi and told her, "God just wanted us to give you this Pepsi as a way to say he loves you." It changed her life.

I think of Kathy and how she'd been involved in everything spiritual but Jesus, and then found the real thing here. I think of Juan and Beth, who knew after their first week here that they had to do it his way—starting with the way they were living together outside of marriage.

I was leading a small group, and there was a young lady named Venisha who had come to Christ, found the church, and was trying out small groups. She eventually went on to be baptized and be a part of our worship team. One night at the group, I asked her about her heritage, and she said she was a mix of Jamaican, Asian, Latin, and American Indian. And it occurred to me, when we refer to racial or cultural diversity diversity, it's not necessarily referring to different races and cultures being brought together in one corporate body, but in one *physical* body! The colors really blend into one. You look around and try and figure out who is black and who is white and who is Latino...and you're just not sure. And if you were to ask people to separate themselves along those

lines, most can't. So you don't try to address all of the different cultures. You just keep it simple so that they all can connect. You go beneath the surface to be "just human."

An example of this was a comment that a long-time member made to us about the growing number of African American church-goers who were coming to our church, despite there being a few vibrant African American churches in our neighborhood. He explained to us that they didn't want to go to those churches because the services were so long, which is normal for that culture. We realize most people don't want to sit in church for more than about an hour. For most of us, we can't concentrate for longer than that unless there's popcorn. So, while we work hard to understand and respect culture, we're trying to connect on a level that is deeper than culture.

The story of the Miami Vineyard to date is mostly found in the word *acceptance*. Our unofficial motto is, "Come as you are and you'll be loved."

SOUTH SUBURBAN VINEYARD

A brand-new church plant has a radical vision.

Adapted from Geno Olison

Our mission from the beginning was to build a multicultural church. But to do that, we decided to build a multicultural team first. I thought we had a better chance if our team was visibly multicultural.

You hit the ground not knowing what will happen. We didn't know if we'd be able to do it: to have a multicultural church. But I do know that I was not seeing it done effectively, inside or outside the Vineyard. Our starting model is pretty different from other models. I spent the first 18 years of my life in the African American church. When I moved to Champaign, I got involved in InterVarsity...and then I met the Vineyard. Both of those groups were mostly white people. Those two drastically different experiences from my background made me upset that everyone seemed to be okay with homogeneous churches.

So I felt called to change that.

My wife and I are a biracial couple; I'm African American, and she's white. We have a passion to see life done in a way that is open to the difficulties that multi-racial families face. A lot of people from multi-racial families are attracted to our church...they can understand all the difficulties of growing up with that background. A lot of our members come from families where that's the case.

Our first public service was this past November. There were so many people from different cultures there. I don't know whether this is just fleshly and selfish, but I would have been disappointed if we hadn't had a bunch of people from different cultures there.

To start a homogeneous church and then work from there—well, we have seen other churches having a lot of difficulty turning around once there's homogeneity. That's why we wanted to hit the ground this way.

We picked Homewood, Illinois as the place to plant our church. It's a straight-south suburb of Chicago. I grew up in the inner city. It was all

homogeneous African American, especially church culture and friendship circles. But within the last ten years, a number of housing projects were torn down in Chicago. The downtown areas are being redeveloped into condos and that kind of thing, and a lot of people from the city have been displaced out to the suburbs.

So recently my parents purchased a place in Homewood. When my wife and I were looking at places to plant a church, we would drive through Homewood looking around at the people. “Is that a Latino—no, are they mixed?” We must have looked pretty strange to all the people around! But we just wanted to know, “Is this area truly diverse?” So we’d drive around and try to guess everyone’s ethnicities. We wanted to go to a city that was headed in the multi-ethnic direction, or one that was already there and openly proud of it. We looked at Denver; we looked at other places. It seems that people living in Homewood now have generally been happy to see more diversity. It seemed natural that we could plant there, be close to family, and that we wouldn’t be completely alienated.

My father pastors a church in the city. There was a young couple there that the Lord placed on my heart. I was trying to figure out a way to approach them to be on our planting team. Finally I decided to talk to my dad and ask him if it was okay. It turned out the man in this couple was already interested in our vision, so my dad released them to start coming to our small group meetings. It took them three or four months to feel like God had given them the green light to officially join us.

I look at the whole process...it was like an onion being peeled back slowly. God brought our whole team together, but it took a long time. I had to be patient.

A while before we planted, I was sitting in Happy Leman’s office, and he said to me, “What makes you think you can do this?” I told him, “We get to start from scratch. We have a blank slate. God sent us the resources—the opportunity.” I knew we could mess up, but God was providing the start for us.

I’ve gone to church-planting boot camps for the last five years. Sometimes they sit you down and tell you the worst horror stories. You brace yourself for a crazy pace where you can only kiss your wife once a week! But then what happened was, we found that there was actually a change of pace for the better. We had a fantastic team. We asked them to commit for two years, and that means everybody pulls their own weight. Everyone responded to the challenge beautifully. And it was all way more fun than we expected it to be.

We hit the ground in June of last year, which gave everyone time to settle into the area. There are still struggles; not everyone loves their jobs. I work part-time and watch my son during the day, but I also get to meet with new people from church; have lunches; connect people. We had our first membership class two weeks ago.

We’ve just finished our 20th week of services. Around 50 people attend each week. The newspaper called us this week. God is working.

Some of the challenges are on the multicultural front—especially worship. Most of our leaders come from a rock background. And we don’t want to have strictly gospel music, either. We’re going for a

crossover, and that requires a higher level of expectation. We’re working on our craft, trying to simplify. We want to have a good fusion. I’m discipling the worship leader right now. We’re getting there, but we’re not there yet.

One personal struggle for me happened after our first service. 86 people showed up for our first service on November first. It was a lot of family, a lot of friends who were supporting what we were doing. The second week, there were 29 people. It was a very deflating weekend. It felt weird and empty after the first weekend. It was the hardest sermon for me to preach, just with that amount of people there.

But the interesting thing was, there were two brand new families there that second weekend. One was an interracial couple (Mexican and Hawaiian). So one of these couples had a boy who played with a neighbor kid. When they went to pick their boy up one day, the other couple asked them if they wanted to come to a Vineyard service with them. So both of these families came to our church. They were the only people there who were not a part of our church-planting team! But for whatever reason, they all stayed. I have no idea why. I don’t know why they came back. I wouldn’t have come back if I’d heard my sermon! But they did. They had come from a huge megachurch, but they stuck with us. They became good friends with us. All of them serve faithfully every Sunday. They help with sound, and kids, and just about everything we do.

We put a bunch of invitation flyers up at Jewel’s. Every time I’d go back in there, a bunch of the flyers would be missing. I always thought that someone was taking them down and throwing them away.

But then one day, a man and his family came to the Vineyard. He told us, “I saw this flyer at Jewel’s, and I’ve been holding onto it for five or six weeks now.” He’d been listening to my sermons online and finally decided to visit. He has three kids, and he’s also a former pro wrestler! But wrestling has a lot of history for him that he wants to distance himself from now—it was too much of his identity. Having him is great. We have to tell him to go home after church! He keeps staying and helping with things.

I would also have a pig roast every week. It would gather maybe 75 people from the neighborhood. One woman started coming to our Vineyard through that pig roast. She was absolutely loving that roast! She started coming off and on to small group. I am just delighted when I think of all the stories of people finding us in unusual ways.

I think we’re seeing our vision happen. People are drawn to us; you see one or more faces that actually look like you. You’re not the only one of your ethnicity there. We didn’t want that. People won’t give your church a second visit if they feel uncomfortable. If people don’t know how to press through or break through their discomfort and work through the external barriers, they’ll give up. We want to communicate at our church that we value diversity in leadership and in decision making. We want to remove as many barriers to the gospel as possible.

[END]



FINDING

REAL

HOPE &

CHANGE

THROUGH

THE

CHURCH

WHERE ARE ALL THE ANSWERS?

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHIL STROUT

CE: These are really desperate times both in the U.S. and abroad, even dark. How is the church faring during this period?

Phil: This is not the hour for the church to lose her collective nerve...but in certain ways, that's what it feels like. This is not a time for us to back up and shrink away from who we are as the bride of Christ. In fact, it's just the opposite. It is time for the church to recognize that we have been invited into the mission of God. We need to re-familiarize ourselves with Paul's statement in Romans 1:1 ("Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God"), and Acts 13 ("While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'") There is an air of supreme confidence in these passages. I believe we've lost a little bit of that confidence, and we need to rediscover it. We can find that in the Scriptures, by reading about men and women who understood their calling in the midst of a different set of dark times.

It's popular sport to bash the church for what it is and isn't. We criticize how it responds to the needs of the culture. But when you get out of the realm of the theoretical and see what is happening in the day-to-day, the nitty-gritty across everyday life, you find that good things are happening. Look at how church is providing a support system for people all across the country by using small groups. When people are in small groups that stem from local churches, those groups meet people's real everyday needs. That is being the church; that is missional. It's kind, and it's outward-focused.

CE: There have been some major tragedies at home and abroad. Natural disasters, etc. How have you seen the church responding in a way that brings hope to people?

Phil: One of the things that is so wonderful, even though it's in a tragic setting, is to see the response of churches to the tragedy that just happened in Haiti. Relief and care are happening through governments and so many non-government organizations (NGOs) all over the world, but thousands and thousands of churches are also rallying for a people they don't know, in a country they don't know much about. They're asking, "What can we do?"

There are a lot of professional groups already there, and many of those organizations are backed by dollars from local churches and filled with workers who are Christians. I believe we've got to keep our nerve and say we are a people called by God to...well, fill in the blank! Put your name in there. Put your church's name in there. And then add what it is that the Holy Spirit has called you to do. Our calling as a church, and as local church bodies, are not to be taken lightly.

CE: When times get difficult for churches, it's easy to turn inward and focus on the problems of the church...i.e. giving is low, pastors have to be let go, people are unable to give as much of their time. How do churches turn their focus outward, not inward, in these tough times?

Phil: The church is the hands and feet and heart of God, the true people of God today. Wherever we find ourselves, we find ourselves on a divine assignment. It's not just by chance we ended up in a place.

The church is the only institution that serves people who "aren't there yet." The church honors people who have not arrived. If you've lost that premise and that direction, then you need to turn back to being a people for people who aren't there yet. Be followers of Jesus for people who aren't following.

There are pastors who don't care about the size of the church. Instead they focus on their church's scope of influence. The number of people who show up isn't what's important, and they recognize that. I like the phrase that some groups use (and we use it in our church): "Called to contribute to the redemptive history of this state."

And I truly feel that about my city. I look at the city of Lewiston, Maine, and think of this city as my parish. Some of those people get up on Sunday morning and gather in a public worship service. I can consider myself a pastor of the heads and leaders of this city. If you take that perspective, then you take on a different approach to ministry.

We automatically get involved in people's lives because the whole city is our parish. You've been placed in a certain community, and you're there for the non-followers of Jesus. That makes you much more collectively part of the community than as an outpost trying to pluck people out of it.

I have a hard time separating mission out from the neighborhoods and the nations. From my perspective, if it has to do with the church, it's part of the global community. It moves that way naturally. But our desire to help others abroad shouldn't be affected by tough economic times. Our 401(k) shouldn't determine what we do or don't do among the nations. We need to be reaching people no matter what.

CE: What are some practical ways you encourage the people in your church to do this in your own community?

Phil: Encourage your people to be involved and volunteer for things that go on in the community. For example, in small towns and large cities, you can volunteer in places like libraries and hospitals. Sometimes when we talk about volunteering in our churches, we talk about only what people can do in our particular church. But what about when we look at the volunteer fire department or Red Cross, there are so many citizens working to make the community better. Why wouldn't Christians want to do that?

We encourage people to go to other places like hospice care or drug rehab facilities—any service that exists but is weak because of the lack of volunteers. What the church can give is a lot of work hours. When people know their hours will be used wisely, they'll be more likely to volunteer.

So when I say, "Let's give some work hours to the community," it's not just giving away bottled waters or Coca-Colas to have a direct impact for our church; we're living intentionally in the natural flow of life within our community.

If you only have 3-5 free hours per week and only give that time to the church, you will only minister to church people. But there is one group in our city that works with teens and has drop-ins, and volunteers tutor them in reading. Some churches aren't big enough to develop their own community center, so they need to realize they can volunteer for some of these things outside of the church. We encourage our people to get involved in the community, otherwise I don't know if they'll truly have a heart for the people around them.

Look around your community and see what's already been built. The connection is holistic and integral. When you hang around in situations like that, Jesus always pops up. People are always running into Jesus in the middle of that. Sooner or later, there's going to be some level of encounter. You couldn't avoid it if you tried.

CE: You mentioned that you want to be part of the "redemptive history" of your city and your state. What does that mean to you? And what does that mean to the broader picture of missions?

Phil: Someone challenged me by saying the "redemptive history" phrase sounded high-minded. My response was, "Why would I want to go to a church that thought it wasn't important enough to help a city?"

As a follower of Jesus, I don't want to be led by someone who wouldn't say in their heart, "I was sent by God to do this." Why would I want to be in a church that doesn't believe theologically and philosophically that it is sent by the Holy Spirit, like Paul and Barnabas were? I think the nerve of the church and its leaders is being shaken. We can't lose that nerve. We're always in the fight and we don't always see it.

For us, playing a role in the redemptive history of our city looks like many different things that are easy to do. For example, how many churches in America are using Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University? How many are families are learning sound, good financial philosophy and how many are choosing not to go any further into debt? What does that do? It contributes to the well-being of the community and drops the need for people to be in situations where the state and community has to help them. It's where the church can contribute to the well-being of society. The church doesn't get credit for a lot of things, and that's okay. But it is important for the church to understand that they are playing a role in the redemptive nature of the community to where God has called them.

When you talk about the redemptive history of any country—let's use Spain as an example—we're not talking about simply the saving of souls, getting people to punch a heavenly ticket. We're talking about redeeming everything that is great about these people!—culture, environment, everything. Following Jesus is part of the process of redemption, and that eventually leads to the renewal of so many other things in a culture.

Where there is reconciliation among people in history, the redemption of history occurs. Anything that fosters forgiveness, reconciliation, care for people or creation—all that contributes to the redemptive history of people and their culture.

Using Spain again—there have been so many famous Spaniards and people who have influenced the cause of Christ for good in that country. We want to see redemption continue to take place. We're hoping that Christ comes full-circle there and in other countries like Russia and Germany.

CE: Where are places you are seeing the church rise up? What are the opportunities?

Phil: Marriage help is a big one. Marital problems can often boil down to three things: communication, money and sex. How much time and effort does the church put into that? I think a sterling effort toward that is happening. It's one way the church can help in an area that really needs it. I think financial counseling is another one. That's an untold benefit that the church is doing in America right now.

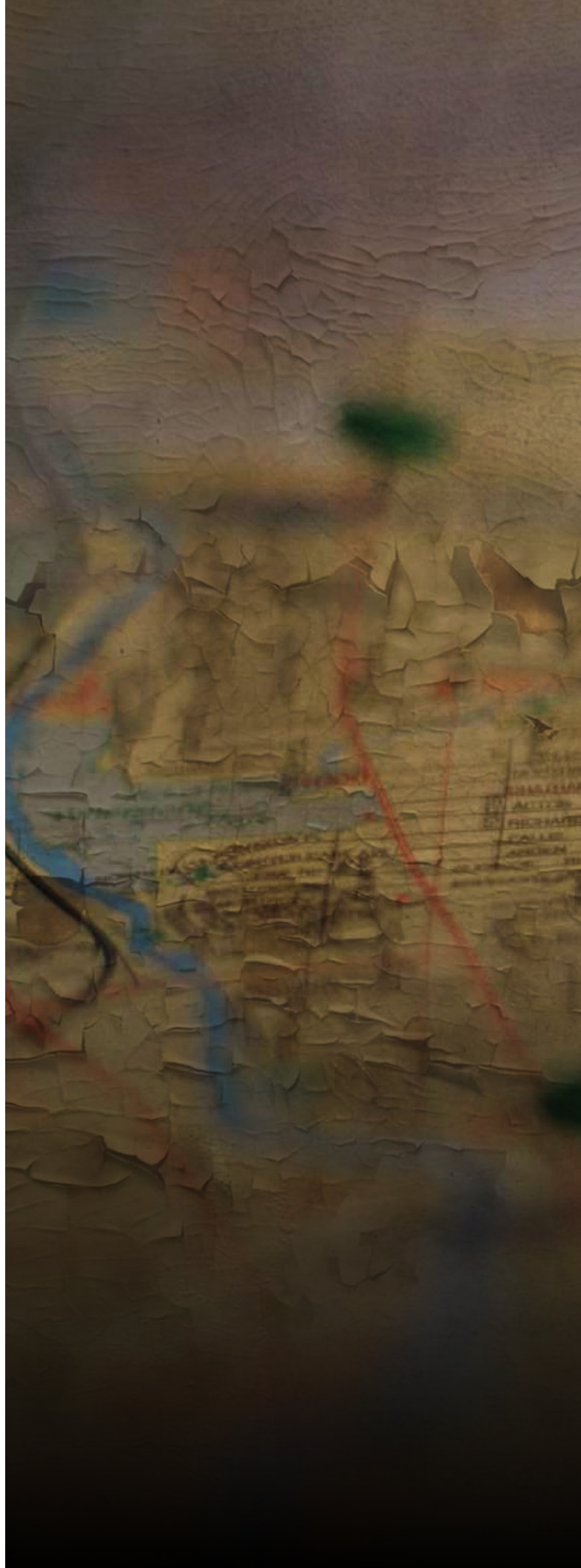
There are opportunities for churches to make a major contribution to the redemptive history of their communities through caring for families with marital counseling, premarital counseling, divorce care, and also care for children whose parents are divorcing. Those are huge contributions. Or there's Celebrate Recovery, which infuses Christian values into AA principles. Those are awesome contributions churches can make.

Also, if you want an example of why ecology and the environment need to be at the forefront of a church's mission, just look at Haiti. That country has so little arable land, and the issue of deforestation and soil erosion is a major contributing factor as to why Haiti remains so impoverished. It's a very real thing.

I was just with a pastor on the border of Haiti. He asked me, "Do you think churches would sign up if we created a nursery for trees and recommitted to a long-term replanting of trees all through Haiti?" He said the church needs to help the people of Haiti in the short term, but the environmental issue is so long-term that if we don't do something now, we won't have anything in the pipeline. He wants to develop a greenhouse and nurseries for trees to then be replanted. More trees in Haiti would replenish the soil and make it rich in nutrients again.

I'd love to look every pastor in America right in the eye and say, "Don't forget, you were sent here by the Holy Spirit. And if you were called to do this, you are set apart." The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." If we are given an assignment, then we have the power to do it.

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MULTI-SITE CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN THE VINEYARD

BY STEVE
NICHOLSON &
RICK OLMSTEAD

For the past several years, a group of Vineyard churches has been experimenting with operating as one church meeting in several locations. This is known as the development of a *multi-site church*. The most common situation is to form an additional congregation in a new location. There is a site-based person or team to pastor the new congregation, but they use centralized teaching via video transmission (or occasionally a rotating teaching team). Several of these churches have been requesting guidance from the Vineyard board, and this paper is intended to answer that request. We hope to begin setting a foundation of guidance and direction so that Vineyards around the country can benefit from this new model in the healthiest ways.

Benefits of One Church in Many Locations

1. The potential to reach new cities and new areas. We often find that people are commuting long distances to Vineyard churches, due to the lack of a Vineyard in their immediate community. But they can be limited by the distance. Normal church planting is not always an option because of the type of location or the lack of available lead church planters. Starting a new site from an already successful church is an easy way to meet this need: the leadership is already established, crucial lessons have already been learned (and mistakes have already been made), the teaching is well developed, and support structures are in place. In some cases, new congregations can be formed in outlying small or rural communities which are usually unlikely to be the recipients of a “traditional” church plant. Under the multi-site strategy, a significant new congregation in a new location can generally be formed in a short amount of time, with a minimum of investment.
2. This approach can bring the best aspects of larger churches and smaller churches together—allowing a smaller feel with larger church programs to back it up.
3. The strategy allows previously untapped talent to emerge. New worship and children’s teams are formed. Someone with a pastoral gifting—but who may lack the specific communication skills or capability to cast vision to start their own church—can still serve in a significant way.
4. Leverages the gifting and skills of the top leadership to reach even more people more quickly.
5. Usually a multi-site church capitalizes on the amount of people who come to Christ.
6. It’s a great training and development location for future leaders and church planters.
7. It’s generally less expensive than building a bigger and bigger building for more people to commute to.
8. In some cases, becoming a multi-site location of a larger successful church is a good option for a small church that is dying and unable to get the home-based leadership necessary to recover.

Challenges with Multi-sites

Most challenges center on how this approach will affect our overall church planting efforts. Will church planters who could plant independent churches be siphoned off to lead sites? How will we continue to develop senior leadership if too many never have to struggle through the purer circumstances and lessons of senior leadership? How will this affect our ministry resources? How does the larger Vineyard relate to multi-site campuses?

Steps Toward a Healthy Approach

There are many different approaches toward multi-site church development, and we think there are a few basic principles that can steer us toward an approach that will be healthy for all of us over the long term.

1. Both/and: We encourage large churches engaged in developing into one church with many locations to set goals and take intentional steps, both toward the development of new sites and also toward the planting of new independent churches. If both are being developed, then everyone has a place, and no one is being diverted from their God-given call.
2. Allow for growth. Site-pastors who wish to grow in leadership should be encouraged to work on their ministerial and preaching skills, recognizing the possibility that their congregations could grow into independent bodies over time.
3. Local community outreach. Each site should be encouraged and helped to run some of its own programs or outreaches to serve its particular community. It’s important that we be serving the poor and reaching our neighbors in each community in which we are located.
4. Maintain relationships. Both the senior leadership team and also the site pastors should be invited and encouraged to attend and participate in area and regional events with their colleagues. The Vineyard is built on relationship, and it will make a huge difference if the leader of each local congregation is actively involved in Vineyard relationships.
5. Multi-site churches should not target smaller churches for assimilation as a site *except when the small church has no other good option and is requesting to be included*. Remember

that many of our smaller churches are vital and positive expressions of faith in their communities.

Q and A with a practitioner

Ben Hoerr is the Executive Pastor at the Vineyard Church in Urbana, Illinois. He has overseen the birth of two sites in outlying communities in the last year while their church has continued to stay engaged in church planting. We asked him for some practical thoughts about this strategy.

Why did you start multi-sites?

I wish I could tell you it was because we had great spiritual insight. But the truth is, we merely observed—and our annual church survey confirmed—that people who live more than 20 minutes from our campus were 1) less likely to be involved in a small group, 2) less likely to volunteer or attend training events, 3) their children (especially JV and high school) were not as able to participate in midweek events, and 4) perhaps more importantly, they were much less likely to invite their friends, families, neighbors, and co-workers to attend with them because these people resist the distance and drive.

Consequently, we decided to “pick the low-hanging fruit” of pockets of committed members who were driving over 30 miles one way to attend weekend services. There were two concentrations of such people...one in Sullivan (50 miles south, town of 4,200) and Danville (30 miles east, town of 34,000). We made the decision to multiply and extend our ministry as we became one church in many locations.

What’s been the biggest upside?

Two years ago my kids bought my wife Tina and me a Netflix subscription as a Christmas present. I never would have imagined how that simple paradigm shift in how we watch movies would be so powerful. Now I am a Netflix evangelist, and I tell everyone.

As a parallel to that, you could now call me a multi-site evangelist as well, because the upside of this “doing church” paradigm shift is so huge. If I could only share one benefit, it would unequivocally be this: these two communities now each have a vibrant, healthy Vineyard church in a much shorter time span

than a more typical church-planting timeline would have allowed. Sullivan averages nearly 300 attenders every weekend with 11 small groups; Danville has 230 regular members with 6 small groups. Plus both campuses have a complete array of other programs, ministries, and outreaches.

Other upsides: One of the most surprising things is how both youth groups have experienced explosive growth. We had less than five teens from either locale in our youth ministry before, and now both campuses have youth groups of about 30 teens.

It has also been wonderful to see that our goal of reaching the unchurched has materialized. Many of the new people (and emerging leaders!) at the new campuses are unchurched individuals or families.

A few more: Multi-sites create many more opportunities for people to use their spiritual gifts to serve the church; they allow for greater updraft into leadership; they provide openings to serve on the home campus; and they leverage a church's resources with efficiency.

What's been the biggest challenge?

Jesus said that all things were possible, not that they would be easy. There are many challenges, depending on the stage of planning, development, or post-launch operations. Since we didn't know what we were doing, the pre-launch planning was complicated and messy. Post-launch, the biggest struggles have probably been communication, a lack of clarity in decision-making (who reports to whom; who has ultimate authority; etc.), and offering consistent central support from the home campus.

What would you have done differently if you could?

I would have taken more time to plan, to train the campus team leaders, prepare the facilities, and develop more (and healthier) small groups in these communities before the launch.

What one piece of advice do you have for people who are thinking about starting multi-sites?

Read everything you can; ask as many questions as you can; and visit as many as you can. There is no substitute for just plain experiencing the vibe on a multi-site campus.

There are helpful resources, many of them free, at Leadership Network (<http://leadnet.org>) and NewThing (www.newthing.org/multisite).

What's the difference between church-planting gifts and site-pastoring gifts?

The multi-site campus pastor must be a leader and gatherer, but need not be wired as a high risk-taker like a church planter. In addition, the multi-site pastor does not necessarily need to have the gift of teaching or preaching, since the sermons are pre-recorded. This frees the site pastor to focus on pastoring the church, encouraging and equipping leaders, and keeping the pedal of outreach to the floor as opposed to spending a great deal of time in sermon preparation!

What's an example of a humorous thing that could happen at a multi-site?

On launch weekend in Danville, I welcomed the audience, did announcements, and explained how the DVD sermons were going to work (we use a DVD recording of the previous week's main campus sermon). When the tech crew hit "play," nothing happened. When a few seconds of silence grew to an awkward half-minute of a blank screen, I improvised by telling a few jokes. After several minutes of furious trouble-shooting, the sermon began, and I nervously sat down, grateful that I am a pastor and not a stand-up. Not a great way to launch, but everyone appreciated that we could laugh at ourselves.

Isn't it true the multi-sites will prevent church planting?

Your question reveals a general presupposition and bias. (Laughter) The simple truth is this: multi-sites are church plants, just a slightly different kind. The reality is that churches of every conceivable denominational stripe and size are planting multi-site campuses. While ten years ago this revolution may have appeared faddish, today we are compelled to acknowledge that multi-sites are one of the bona fide ways that the Holy Spirit is growing the church around the globe (Acts 1:8). It has also been our discovery that churches which have embraced multi-sites are also aggressively doing church planting. It's not an "either/or" issue, it's "both/and." Multi-site is simply another tool we can use to expand the kingdom and reach new communities.

Experiences with the difficulties of multi-sites

Brian Housman is the Executive Pastor of the Greater Boston Vineyard. They have been experimenting with sites for a while, and we asked him to share what they've learned.

In 2005, we began to discuss the idea of planting a church in Boston. Both Boston and Cambridge are relatively small cities, geographically speaking, and they're quite close to one another; only a river separates the two. But people don't tend to cross that river very much. Our rented location was in a fairly ideal location to meet both places: situated on the river next to one of the main bridges, it was in a sort of neutral zone and easily accessible to both Cambridge and Boston. We bought a new building deep in Cambridge. We predicted we would lose some current Boston attendees and stop drawing new Bostonians...we'd probably moved out of their known world.

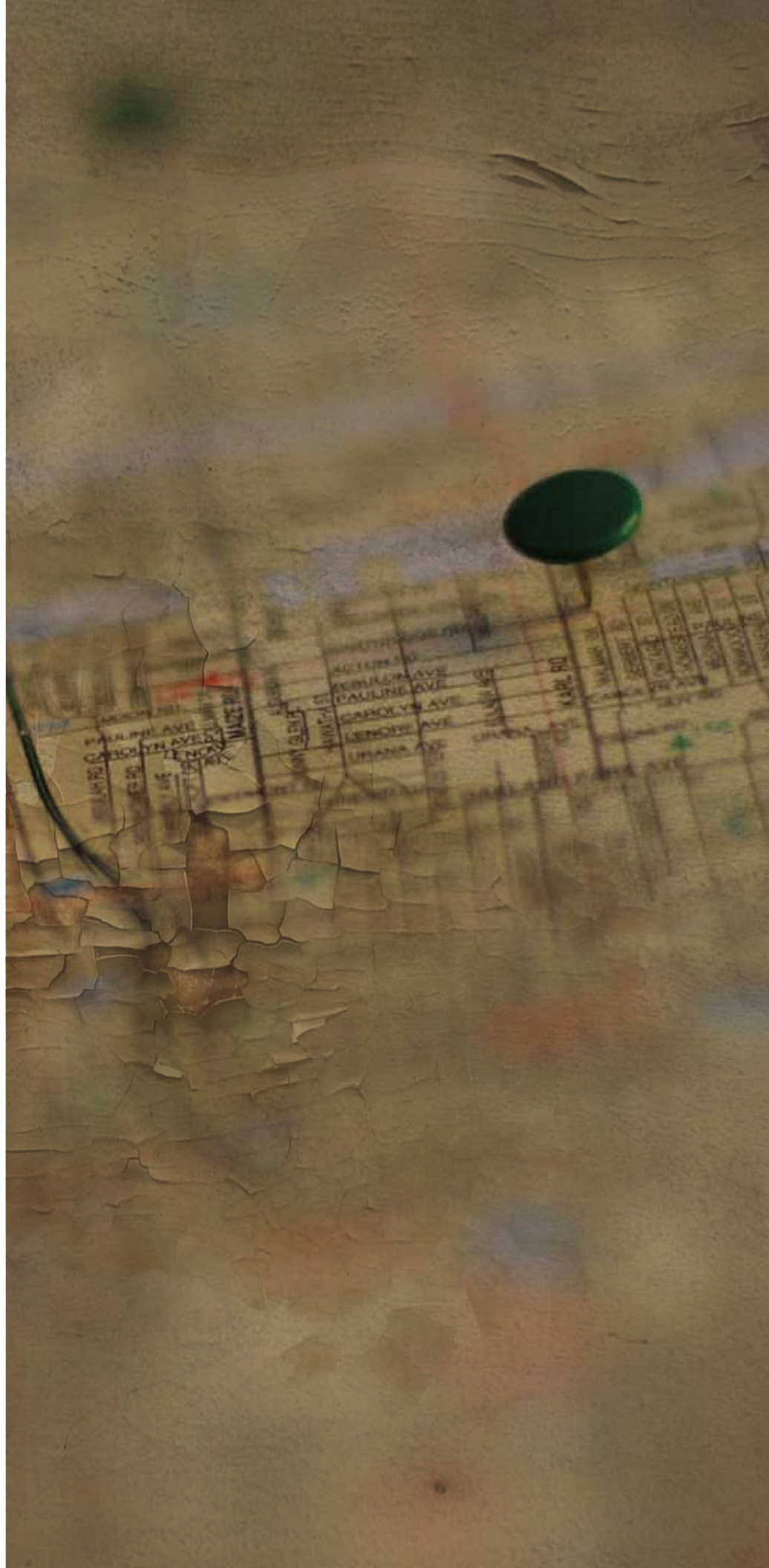
So we started to plant a new church on the Boston side of the river. Then we came across the multi-site concept, which seemed perfect for our situation. We didn't want two different churches; we just wanted two different locations. Being one church in two locations would allow our staff team to continue to work together as one unit. We could pursue one comprehensive publicity campaign. We would reduce overhead by only doing twice the things that absolutely needed to be done twice. People could continue to be in mixed-site small groups together, if they wanted, while getting the same message whichever site they attended.

After about three years, we made the difficult decision to merge back into a single Cambridge site. It was for several reasons. We never quite saw the numerical growth we were hoping for out of having two sites. And while we could muster the leadership to pull off two Sunday programs from our original teams for a time, we began to feel stretched thin after a while without enough new additions. Budget considerations forced us to make some tough cost decisions; merging the two locations was the smartest way to cut costs without affecting quality. And most significantly, our Boston site pastor was in the midst of a severe health crisis. We needed to lighten his responsibilities, but we felt that the Boston site just could not continue to thrive without his attention.

So we recombined into one location last summer. Thankfully, the reintegration has gone very well, and I believe a significant majority of the Boston site membership happily found its way back into the Cambridge site community. Those three years of multi-site experience was a great leadership development opportunity, since many people at all levels at both sites took on greater responsibilities. So, while two locations was a bit too much for us to pull off, I actually think we are having the strongest Sunday experience we've had in many years being all in one place together. Along the way, we learned a lot about the challenges of dealing with two different sizes at the same time (Cambridge was always about four times larger than Boston); and we learned how slight culture differences can make a big difference. I think next time we'll do a much better job of responding to those challenges.

And I do fully expect that there will be a next time. We're a church that is dedicated to the idea of multiplying and reproducing. I think starting new sites and planting new churches will be tools we use for that multiplication. In fact, we're in the midst of birthing a new church in Quincy right now (a nearby city). The first thing we asked ourselves is: is this a site or a plant? In the end, we found that the core mission of this group was just different enough that it made sense to think of it as a plant. The next time, that might not be the case.

[END]



VLI/VBI TRAINING

For the aspiring young leader hoping to be trained for future (and current!) ministry, the options are slightly overwhelming. Seminary? Church work from the ground up? Doing missions overseas? What kinds of programs are actually effective? Having carefully studied over time the struggles young leaders typically face in their quest to be effective in ministry, the Vineyard has developed two theologically based programs meant to train and equip both individuals and churches. They're different in many respects, but both programs place a high value on being trained within a supportive community.

The Vineyard Bible Institute

The mission of the Vineyard Bible Institute (VBI) is “empowering local churches through distance learning.” The program is at its root a series of courses that progressively build on each other, according to the needs of its students. For example, churches can use VBI courses as a credible alternative to other standard Bible study series. Or, young leaders can take courses as a group, which saves to save a church plant the cost of hiring a full-time staff member to oversee training. The courses occur online and take a number of different learning forms (web seminars, interactive activities, practice exams, and so forth). One of VBI's hallmarks is its deep flexibility—any series of courses can be taken and the level of rigor can be chosen, including diploma and non-diploma tracks. VBI also has a unique commitment to connect individuals with a nearby Vineyard church that will mentor and partner with them to complete their studies (each church group likewise is connected with a “partner church”). No one studies in isolation; the structure of VBI's program calls forth a team effort, complete with mentoring and local support.

Additionally, for those individuals who hope to earn a complete degree, VBI partners with St. Stephen's University in Canada to award a Bachelor of Christian Studies (at an average total cost of less than \$15,000). The main focus of VBI courses are kingdom theology (unpacking the mysteries surrounding the Kingdom of God), biblical theology (narrative and interpretation of the Bible), practical theology (implications for life and ministry), and historical/contextual theology (the history of Christianity). Missionaries in China and India are even using VBI materials to teach their own groups of students.

www.vineyardbibleinstitute.org

The Vineyard Leadership Institute

The Vineyard Leadership Institute was formed to train emerging leaders to become more effective in Christian ministry. This mission statement is achieved through a two-year program, which offers a mix of rigorous academic courses (the equivalent of a Masters of Divinity) combined with hands-on learning through each student's involvement in a specific local church. There typically need to be two or more participants in each church for a VLI program to take effect. That way, each student is functioning in a community of learners instead of in isolation. The students are simultaneously mentored by the pastor or pastors of their home church. Individuals have an immediate opportunity to effectively apply theology and ministry principles directly to their own church involvement, rather than studying ministry in a more abstract or theoretical environment.

Each participant in VLI studies an average of 20 hours per week, which combines service in the local church, academic study, leadership and speaking opportunities, and exam preparation. The instructors are theologians who have years of experience as Vineyard pastors, and every year there is a steady placement of VLI graduates into new Vineyard church-planting teams.

www.vli.org



THE CHURCH OF JESUS IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

CONTINUED FROM PG 5

BW: I think the church has already lost its moral purpose for many people. People believe the church exists to meet their need, not as something that is worth dying for because of the value that God places on it. Many people think of the church as something you go to. Going to church starts to look like going to a supermarket: “Well, I’ll get this here, and I’ll shop here for another need, and I’ll get this from this church, and I’ll get that from another church.” Whenever the church is used as the means to an end, it is corrupted. The church is made into a commodity rather than seen as the bride for which Christ died.

There is also the issue of relativism that concerns me. Relativism results from our failure to properly understand and maintain the proper relationship between the truth of our faith and that of the culture we live in. There is always the danger of losing the historical faith by substituting something else – all in the attempt to be relevant. For example, it’s not too popular to call Jesus “God” in our day, yet that is central to our faith. The historical faith, as expressed in the ancient creeds, is a robust faith that has stood the test of time. We cannot opt for anything else.

So there are many things we are tempted toward: the loss of sense of mission, lack of clarity of purpose, loss of understanding of the nature of the church, relativism, and the loss of the historical faith that has been given to us. These all concern me.

JH: How are trans-local institutions relevant to individual local congregations maintaining their sense of purpose and their institutional health? What are the roles of trans-local levels, these leadership structures we have?

BW: Trans-local institutions are essential to the very nature of the church. I think it’s a way of connecting churches, of providing for common tasks and common purposes to be accomplished. A trans-local church institution nurtures diversity within the community as we are intentionally joined together with churches of diverse ethnicities. Further, it serves a pastoral function where mature leaders are able to give guidance to emerging churches and emerging leaders.

JH: Talk about the vital relationship between the local church and the advancement of the kingdom itself.

BW: I don’t really believe that the kingdom can be expanded. The thing that expands is the church. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to pray, “Let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” This implies the kingdom is already here, but we want it to be manifested and realized just like it already is in heaven. I think we misuse the language of expansion or growth when we attach it to the kingdom.

So instead of expansion of the kingdom, I speak of the expansion of the church. The growth of the church is vital to God’s mission. God’s kingdom mission is carried forward by the church. It’s the particular church that’s on a mission. If God’s purposes are going to be achieved in the world, it will happen through the church...the local church.

[END]

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EVENTS

August 13-14

What: Church Planting Boot Camp
Where: Vineyard Central in Norwood, OH
Cost: Free
Who: Active and potential church planters
More information: www.greatlakeschurchplanting.com

October 8-10

What: Discover Weekend
Where: Chattonooga, TN
Who: Leaders who want to discover whether they have been called into full time ministry, and specifically, church planting.
More info: Email Jeff Anderle at jeff.anderle@chattanooga Vineyard.org

October 29-30

What: Church Planting Boot Camp 1
Where: Chattonooga, TN
Who: Assessed church planters and planters in early stages.
More info: Email Jeff Anderle at jeff.anderle@chattanooga Vineyard.org

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