

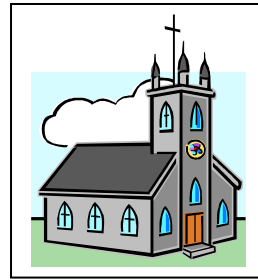
Deacon Ministry Newsletter

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Building a Church That Transforms Lives (Creating Disciples in a Busy World)

There are statistics and stories around every corner, in every pastor's conference and in many homes that suggest that the church just is not working as well as it has in past decades and for past generations. Rather than wallowing in despair, criticism and over analysis let me suggest that we learn from those who are seeing lives changed and build a church that transforms lives in a busy world.

Transformation can happen in a moment as it did with Paul on the Damascus road or transformation can take years as we see in the life of Christ with persons like Peter, Annias, Sapphira, and most of the disciples. What are the transformational elements that church leaders need to pay attention to in order to create disciples in a busy and rapidly changing world?

What Kind of People Are We Trying to Create?

It is crucial that we answer this question as church leaders and particular those who are pastoring the church. Are we wanting to create 'good church people' or 'transformed persons/families' through the sermons we preach, the invitations we extend or the programs we plan? I fear that all too often we are more focused on creating good church men/women that we lose sight of the call to discipleship found in the Great Commission and modeled in the ministry of Christ. We fall into the trap of thinking that we need to 'pack the pews' or 'create good tithers' or better yet create leaders for all our committees and programs that we forget about the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person. We lose sight of the brokenness in lives, the hurt in families and the lostness that many exhibit by the lives they lead.

Unlike past decades our demographics are challenging for churches. We are no longer considered a population of church culture people. Most today do not value church, Bible, God, Jesus or any of our church traditions. Most in our world today are non-believers, and most not interested in being believers in Christ, however we have an all time high interest in spirituality. Many are looking for relief from pain, struggle, strife in relationships, dysfunctions and brokenness. Unfortunately most of these pre-Christian persons are not making it into our traditional churches. Many have not been invited, some have visited and found us to be too judgmental or irrelevant.

Pre and Post Conversion Discipleship?

There was a time in our church history where we focused on discipling new believers and growing those who were church members. This typically happened in classes, seminars and sometimes through mentoring/discipling relationships. This was post conversion discipleship. Today, our biggest mission is outside our membership and our church walls and programs. Therefore, today we are having to learn how to engage in pre conversion discipleship. How do we find teachable moments and divine appointments in relationships? How do we create multiple, non-threatening entry points where non-believers can explore beliefs, relationships and questions of faith and life? How do we be life coaches that helps move persons forward in their faith life? These are avenues for pre-conversion discipleship. (I explore this in greater detail in my other books www.transformingsolutions.org)

Building a church that transforms lives demands that we be good at pre and post conversion discipleship. This calls us to rethink curricula design, worship and bible study experiences, small group designs and the place and times we do church. (I explore this in greater detail in my book Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age)

Creating a Strategy for A Transforming Church

Since most transformation takes time, patience, perseverance and intentionality churches need to create a wholistic approach to discipling. Let me suggest two ways of getting at this challenge. Both are similar in design. One has a biblical framework taken from the ministry of Christ – Come and See, Come and Follow Me, Come Be with Me and Abide in Me. (I have dealt with this extensively in my books if you are interested pointing you to Reframing Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age for more explanation.

www.transformingsolutions.org) The other is detailed on www.discipleshipteam.org – Pulpit Approach, Program Approach, Person to person Approach; Process Approach to discipling.

Pulpit Approach challenges the pastor and worship planning team to create worship experiences that not only shares Biblical knowledge or concepts but works intentionally toward life transformation. The sermon, music, relationships, dramas, testimonies, offertory, invitation and pre and post service activities need to be intentionally focused on calling forth, affirming and celebrating life change in lives, workplaces, classes, groups, choirs, families and communities.

Program Approach is understood by most. Typically this is driven by curricula at a set time and place (usually the church on Sunday or Wednesday night). While this has strengths it also ignores the masses of persons who do not come to the programs.

Person-to-Person Approach centers on relationships and usually takes place outside Sunday and outside the church building. This can be mentoring relationships, coaching relationships, counseling relationships and even in some cases recreational relationships that serve as entry points for persons and provides a safe place for persons to explore questions of faith and life. There are many who

have marriage mentors; mentors for parents of teenagers; one on one Bible Studies and now a host of bloggers and online podcasts and Bible Studies offer persons places to explore and grow in their faith journey. (I explore these options in my article “Bible Study for 21st Century Adults?”)

Process Approach is wholistic and very intentional about asking ‘how does each thing our church does transform lives and disciple people?’ The intent is that a clear discipleship function is performed by classes, choirs, ensembles, groups, deacons, elders, worship, music, youth ministry, children’s ministry etc.

I hope this opens some options and challenges for you as you seek to build a church that transforms lives. The article is brief and not meant to be exhaustive but to offer some strategies that are beyond what most engage. My other books and writings help expound on these ideas. There’s also many other resources that will help in this adventure and transformation. Here are some books that have been and continue to be great sources of encouragement, hope and guidance.

Resources for the Journey:

Growing Spiritual Redwoods by Bill Easum

The Connecting Church by Randy Frazee

A Peculiar People by Rodney Clapp

Revival That Reforms by Bill Hull

Post Christendom by Stuart Murray

The God Hunt by Karen Maines

A Search for the Spiritual by James White

Unfreezing Moves by Bill Easum

NEW BOOK RELEASED OCTOBER, 2007

Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60: Being Church for all Generations by Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce will be

published by Chalice Press www.cbp21.com; www.amazon.com

A resource for church leaders and church members. The book is filled with practical and proven ideas for churches who desire to minister effectively to all generations without isolating or ignoring any age group.

To book a seminar with Eddie email at EdwardHHammett@mchsi.com

Bill Easum, world renown author and church consultant says in his foreword, “Those who read this book and follow Hammett and Pierce’s coaching will find a win-win approach to reaching both of the cultures present in today’s world. This book should be on the desk of every pastor of an established church for the next two decades.”