

## Ten Paradigm Shifts Towards Community Transformation

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### Part I

All over our nation there is a quiet movement of the Spirit of God that is causing believers to re-examine how they "do church." Churches around our nation are throwing out the old measures of success. It's no longer merely about size, seeker sensitivity, spiritual gifts, church health, nor the number of small groups. It's about making a significant and sustainable difference in the lives of people around us-in our communities and in our cities.

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**1) From building walls to building bridges.** *"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13,14).* The first paradigm shift pertains to where we, as the church, see ourselves in relation to our communities. Will we remain outside of the community inviting people in or will we go to our communities, seeking to be a transforming agent? The church is called to be peculiar in lifestyle, but never called to be isolated from the people it seeks to influence. For many years founding pastor, Robert Lewis, of Fellowship Bible Church (FBC) in Little Rock was content to be growing a successful suburban mega church. By his admission, FBC was a "success church." Success churches seek to grow by having attractive programs and offerings that people can come to and benefit from. However, Robert grew increasingly dissatisfied with the impact FBC was having on the community. So he made an appointment with the mayor of Little Rock and asked one question, "How can we help you?" The mayor responded with a list of challenges facing the greater Little Rock area. FBC then challenged themselves with the question, "What can we do that would cause people to marvel and say, 'God is at work in a wonderful way for no one could do these things unless God were with them?'" That one question was the first step in becoming what Lewis calls a "bridge-building church." For the past four years, FBC has joined with over 100 other churches and over 5,000 volunteers in the greater Little Rock area and served their communities by building parks and playgrounds and refurbishing nearly 50 schools. After getting new shelving for her classrooms, one school principal said, "I think this is the most fabulous day of my life as far as education is concerned. I've been in this 29 years and this is the first time a community or church project has come through for us." Once a church makes this mental shift regarding how it lives in its community, it is only limited by its creativity in how it can serve its community and be the salt and light it was meant to be.

**2) From measuring attendance to measuring impact.** *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast...mixed into a large amount of flour until it's worked all through the dough" (Matthew 13:33).* In a post-modern world, most people are neither impressed with the size of a church nor its commitment to "truth." Yet, from the cover of TIME magazine to the front page of the Wall Street Journal, transformational community-centered ministries are grabbing the attention of the American people. Perhaps, in this century, the greatest apologetic for the reality of Jesus Christ living in a community will be observational more than propositional. Effective ministry has always been holistic, combining good deeds with good news.

When Tillie Burgin started Mission Arlington, her mission was simple-take the church to the people who were not going to church-"to hang out and hover around John 3:16." As she ventured out to meet and minister to her neighbors, she was immediately challenged by Jehovah's Witnesses who told her, "You're invading our territory. Get back into your church building where you belong." Today, Mission Arlington is a house church movement of nearly 250 community house churches (and nearly 4,000 in attendance) serving over 10,000 people a week in the Arlington, Texas community with food, furniture, medical and dental care, school transportation, child and adult day care, counseling, etc. What can Jesus do for a community? The people of Arlington know. Every year hundreds of people come to Christ through this transformational ministry. Lives are being touched. Lives are being changed. The church should and can make a huge difference in a community.

Windsor Village United Methodist Church has made a big difference in southwest Houston. From 25 members in 1982, Windsor Village is currently the spiritual home for more than 14,000 members. Embracing both evangelism and economic development and armed with the belief that every member is a minister, each congregant is encouraged to embrace Jesus' mission of identifying and holistically meeting

the needs of those around them. Under the leadership of Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell, the church purchased a 104,000 square-foot former K-Mart that was converted into their "Power Center." Since 1999, the Power Center has had an estimated \$28.7 million impact on the community creating over 500 construction jobs and 300 regular jobs through the Power Center which serves over 9,000 families a month through Windsor Village's over 100 ministries. Currently they are engaged in developing a 24-acre planned residential community consisting of over 450 affordable single-family homes called Corinthian Pointe and they continue to make a difference.

In 1988, Vaughn and Narlene McLaughlin moved into a depressed area of Jacksonville, Florida, to begin a church designed to meet the needs of the whole person. Today their converted Bell South building called the "Multiplex" houses nearly 20 for-profit businesses including the Potter's House Café, a credit union, a beauty salon, a graphic design studio and a Greyhound Bus terminal, all started by church members who lacked capital but had a dream. Another building serves as an incubator for two dozen new businesses. The multiplex also houses a 500-student Christian Academy. In addition to their ministries of economic empowerment and education, they also have nearly 25 other ministries such as a prison and jail ministry, youth ministry, Big and Little Brothers, and free car repair. They also have a team of 250 volunteers who "look after things in the city" even if it means to simply sweep the streets of Jacksonville. Though an outstanding preacher, to Bishop Vaughn McLaughlin, ministry is always what happens outside the church - "If you are not making an impact outside of your four walls, then you are not making an impact at all." In 1999, Bishop McLaughlin was named "Entrepreneur of the Year" by Florida State University. Is it any mystery why the city and its leaders have so wholeheartedly embraced Potter's House? The question he repeatedly asks is the question that churches in all kinds of neighborhoods are increasingly asking themselves: "Would the community weep if your church were to pull out of the city? Would anybody notice if you left?"

## Part II

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### **From encouraging the saints to attend the service to equipping the saints for works of service.**

*"It is (God) who gave some to be...pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people **for works of service...**"* (Ephesians 5:11,12) In the typical church, lay people are asked to serve in five or six capacities:

- Teach a Sunday School class
- Work in the nursery
- Lead a home Bible study or small group
- Sing in the choir
- Be an usher or greeter
- Serve on a board or committee

And pastors lament that only about 20% of their members are "active." Could it be that the service opportunities are not broad enough to engage the energies and passions of people in the church? Robert Lewis notes that when people entered his church they were excited for about 4-5 years. How could they not be excited? Fellowship Bible is a teaching church and Robert is an incredible teacher. But he observes that after around five years, people get bored with church if they are not involved in ministering to others. It was not until the church began to serve their community did members find their serving niche and continue in their growth.

Tim Keller, of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, writes that the process of mobilizing members into ministers "starts by articulating clearly and regularly a theology of 'every-member ministry'...From the pulpit, in the classes, by word of mouth, it must be communicated that every

layperson is a minister and that ministry is finding needs and meeting them in the goal of the spread of the kingship of Christ."

In the 1980's, a small group in Mariner's Church in Costa Mesa, California, met for a year to study every Scriptures that had to do with the people of God and the needs of a community. They asked themselves two questions-"What could we do?" and "What should we do?" This was the beginning of Mariner's "Lighthouse Ministries." Today, Lighthouse is employing the volunteer hearts and entrepreneurial skills to minister to the under-resourced people in Orange County. In 2001, Lighthouse Ministries employed the dedication and talents of nearly 3,400 church volunteers who gave 95,000 hours of service (the equivalent of 46 full-time staff!) in the form of tutoring foster children, mentoring motel families, taking kids to camp, visiting the elderly, teaching English at one of their learning centers, working in the Mariner's Thrift Store (\$168,000 in sales last year) distributing Christmas gifts, team building with teens at their leadership camp, assistance with immigration papers, working in transitional housing or volunteering with Orange County Social Services. Despite the prolific use of volunteers, volunteering is simply the avenue to "build relationships with people in our community." Recently they were featured on National Public Radio for their work in providing transitional housing for youth leaving foster care. Last year they touched the lives of nearly 12,000 people in their community through their relational volunteer ministries. Their mission of "Bringing Christ's hope to those in need" is being fulfilled.

### **From duplication of human services and ministries to partnering with existing services and ministries**

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Nearly every community has a number of human service agencies that are morally positive and spiritually neutral that are doing their best to meet the needs of the underserved and under-resourced people of the community. Such agencies include the local food bank, homeless shelter, emergency family housing, and safe houses for abused women, etc. Equally true there are church and parachurch ministries that are effective in ministering to specific target audiences (business community, youth, college students, etc). Rather than starting a new ministry, why not form partnerships with existing groups as "partner ministries" of a local congregation? Chances are that people from your congregation are already serving in many of these organizations. Why not use the current community energy to create synergy? The Bible is replete with examples of how God used secular people in partnership with his people to fulfill his purposes. Think of Joseph and Pharaoh, Nehemiah and Artaxerxes, and Esther and King Ahasuerus.

Rick Rusaw is pastor of a 2,900-member LifeBridge Christian Church in Longmont, Colorado. Several years ago, LifeBridge made a conscious decision to "care for their community." They invited local human service agencies to office on their campus and encouraged members to get involved in the life of the community. "We're just looking for ways to help the city," Rick explains. "For example, we decided we didn't want to start a Christian school but to get involved in serving the needs of the existing public schools of our community. We don't need to duplicate what is already out there." Last year, when a local high school student took his life, the school principle called Rick at LifeBridge and asked if they could send over 20 counselors for three days to be on campus with the kids. When asked about how they gained such access into a public high school, Rick responded that he sent over the same 20 folks who had been setting up chairs at assemblies and raking the long-jump pit all year long. Servants always have access to the palaces of kings. Last year, over a thousand people from LifeBridge donated 6,000 hours of community service over Christmas break cleaning three elementary schools top to bottom and then spent another six weekends fixing up a mobile home park. Five auto mechanics from LifeBridge serviced over 300 cars of single moms in the Longmont area. Recently, LifeBridge members came up with 5,000 new ways they could serve their community. Rick sums up his commitment to Longmont-"I used to think I could change the world. Now I just want to change the stream...not by standing on the bank and yelling but by getting in the water."

### **Part III**

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### **From anecdote and speculation to valid information**

Two pieces of information changed the course of Nehemiah's life that resulted in the transformation of a community. In Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah learned that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were broken down and her people were in great distress. These two pieces of accurate information were catalytic to Nehemiah's prayers and plans to restore a broken wall and a broken people. His burden to transform the city came from accurate information. We, too, need correct information about the real needs of our community as well as the resources we have to meet these needs. Do we know the demographic information of our community? Do we know the number of churches? Do we know the spiritual history of our community? Ray Bakke writes that in assessing community needs we need to identify the people in need (poor, disadvantaged, children, elderly, single parents, disabled, prisoners, sick, aliens, etc.) along with the type of needs they have (physical, spiritual/moral, social, emotional or cognitive). Most information is readily available through local human service agencies and the census bureau. We also need to identify the spiritual assets of our community-the number of faith communities and believers. Together, these two research pieces give us a picture of our "mission field" and our "mission force." Armed with accurate information, we can determine best how to go forward.

In 1994, 21-year-old Pastor Matthew Barnett began the Los Angeles "Dream Center" by walking around his neighborhood looking for unmet needs. He saw the thousands of outcast people living on the fringes of society. Today, the Dream Center-"the church that never sleeps" has adopted 50 city blocks (2,100 homes!) that it serves with 200 volunteer staff. Its Franciscan Hospital campus houses 400 people in its rehab and discipleship program and feeds more than 25,000 people a week. They have a free 24-hour medical clinic, a mobile medical unit and dozens of effective ministries that are finding needs and meeting them. Scores of churches around our country have adopted the Adopt a Block strategy as a means of touching the lives of people around them.

In our town of Boulder, Colorado, the pastors realized that they knew very little about the other agencies that were serving our community. They decided to organize a one-day "Magic Bus Tour" to meet with the directors of these agencies, to find out what they did and what help they needed. They visited the local shelter, the food bank, a day-care facility, a health clinic, and a home for runaway youth, the AIDS project, etc.-a total of eight agencies. It was the beginning of bridge-building relationships between the faith community and the community where new openness, healing and friendships have begun. Our pastors are now ministering to AIDS patients and utilizing their churches for overflow nights in partnership with the homeless shelter. One pastor, who is now taking meals to AIDS patients on a weekly basis, was drawn into this ministry by two things-"This was a group of people who were in need of the grace of God and also the group I was most uncomfortable with, so I just thought it was something God wanted me to be a part of. If anything, this ministry is changing my life."

### **From teacher to learner**

*"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak..."* (James 1:19). It is interesting to note that for the historic African-American churches, the concept of holistic ministry is not a new concept. They have never suffered from trying to split effective evangelism from social justice or meeting the needs of those around them. It's how they've always done church. A study of 2,150 black churches by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in their book [The Black Church in the African American Experience](#) report that "nearly 70% of black churches are involved with social service agencies and non-church programs in dealing with community problems." The effective churches see the community as one that is full of assets more than full of problems. Churches in New York City like Concord Baptist Church of Christ, Allen AME and Bethel Gospel Assembly to those in Los Angeles like First AME, Faithful Central Bible Church and West Angeles COGIC have led the way in transforming and preserving their communities. John DiIulio, former Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, sites a study of over 400 of the roughly 2,000 community-serving congregations in Philadelphia:

-Over 90 percent of urban congregations provide social services, from preschools to prison ministries, from food pantries to health clinics, from literacy programs to day-care centers, etc.

- The replacement value of their services in Philadelphia alone is a very conservatively estimated quarter-billion dollars a year.  
Suburban congregations have much to learn from these innovative leaders and ministries.